GREAT DEALS ON USED CARS P. 50

MOST (AND LEAST) RELIABLE APPLIANCES P. 34 | **BEST PILLOWS FOR YOUR BACK AND NECK**

CR Consumer Reports®

SEPTEMBER 2024

RATINGS & REVIEWS

- Laptops
- Yogurt
- Toasters
- Printers
- Lint Removers
- Bike Helmets

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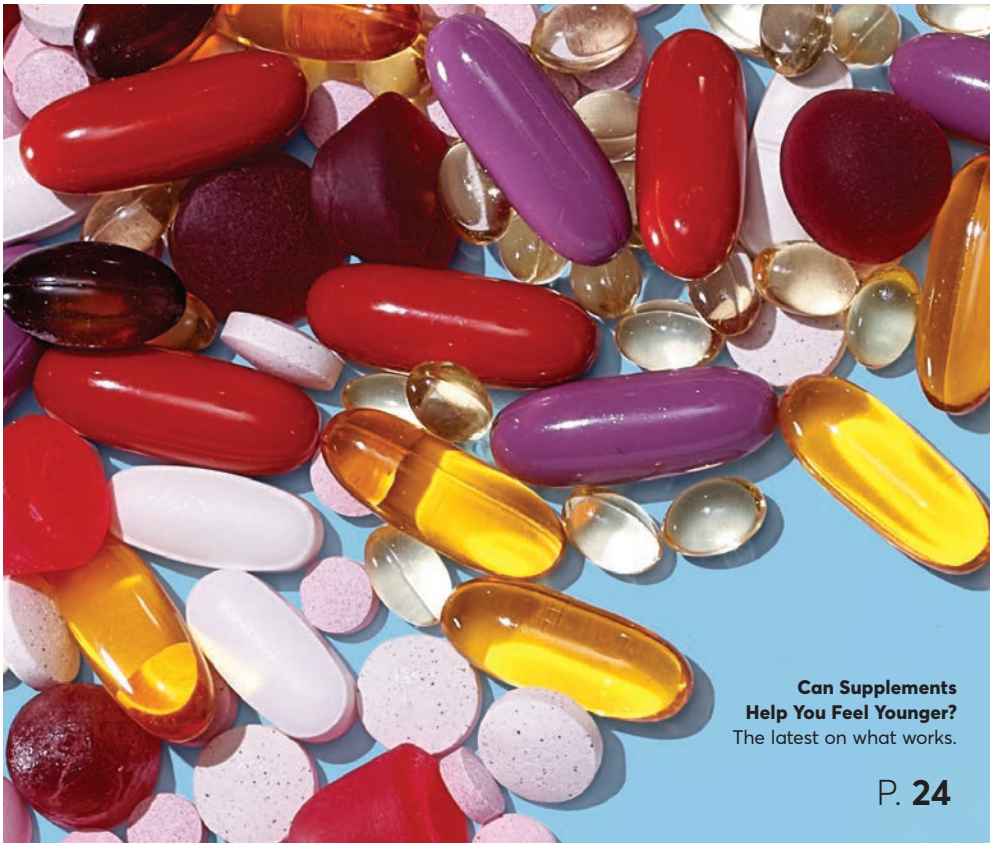

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ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS Consumer Reports is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1936 that works side by side with consumers to create a safe, fair, and transparent marketplace. To achieve our mission, we test thousands of products and services in our labs each year and survey hundreds of thousands of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We pay for all the products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising.

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The Truth About Supplements

IN A MARKETPLACE riddled with misleading ads, consumers need partners they can rely on. CR is dedicated to earning that trust by looking out for you.

One-third of Americans assume the supplements they find in stores have been tested by the Food and Drug Administration for safety, according to a 2022 CR nationally representative survey. But unlike prescription and over-the-counter drugs, the FDA doesn't review, approve, or test supplements sold in the U.S. before they enter the marketplace. Federal regulations also don't generally require supplement makers to prove their products are safe.

Instead, the FDA relies on a database of reports submitted by consumers, healthcare practitioners, and manufacturers to learn about potentially dangerous supplements. But researchers estimate that only about 2 percent of "adverse events" possibly related to these products are ever reported. Nevertheless, dietary supplements are linked to over 20,000 emergency department visits every year and have even been linked to deaths in some cases. Consumers deserve a system that protects us from harm—not a database offering lax oversight only after the fact.

Until we get the regulatory reforms we need, CR is stepping in to shed light on the supplement market. This issue's cover story, on page 24, examines which supplements may offer benefits and which you should skip. We also dive into the steps you can take when choosing products in the store, like looking for a certification seal from the U.S. Pharmacopeia, which sets the most widely accepted dietary supplement standards.

Some supplements are worth trying, but too many marketers in this industry prey on the vulnerability of consumers seeking real ways to improve their health. CR is here to help you navigate the dangers and find what's right—and safe—for you.

Marta Tellado

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President and CEO
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PHOTO: VICTORIA WILL

Getting Plastic Out of Food

Our food travels a complex path to our dinner tables, which increases the risk of contamination from substances that shouldn't be there. Among these are plasticizers, chemicals used to make plastics more flexible and durable. The most common type of plasticizers, called phthalates, can be found inside the bodies of most Americans and have been linked to a growing list of health risks.

CR has been reporting on plasticizers in food for decades. Our most recent testing examined 85 packaged products, including fast foods and organic foods, and found phthalates in nearly every one. The product with the highest level per serving was Annie's cheese ravioli.

This is concerning partly because Annie's, which is owned by food giant General Mills, is an organic food brand that promotes itself to families seeking healthier food options. But four other General Mills products that we tested—Yoplait Original Low Fat Yogurt French Vanilla, Cheerios Original, Green Giant Cream Style Sweet Corn, and Progresso Vegetable Classics Vegetable Soup—also contained relatively high levels of phthalates. So CR wrote the company, urging it to determine where plasticizers are entering its production chains and to take steps to reduce exposure. In May we delivered some 30,000 consumer signatures demanding this action to General Mills' Minneapolis headquarters.

Now we're calling on the Food and Drug Administration to set limits on the amount of these risky chemicals in our food. Help by signing our petition at **CR.org/fdaphthalates**.

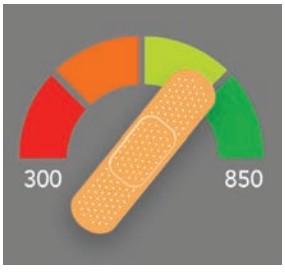
99%

of the food and drinks CR tested contained phthalates.

SOURCE: CR RESEARCH

PROGRESS REPORT

Consumers may soon get relief from dishonest auto sales tactics, if the Federal Trade Commission's Combating Auto Retail Scams (or CARS) Rule is enacted. Aimed at bait-and-switch pricing and junk fees, the proposed rule forbids misrepresentations, requires accurate prices in ads and sales materials, and prohibits the sale of worthless add-on products and services. It was scheduled to go into effect July 30 but has been delayed by a trade group lawsuit. For now, stay vigilant: You'll find tips on which pricey (and often unnecessary) extras to avoid at **CR.org/autoextras**.



Better Credit Reporting

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Some 15 million Americans have medical debt listed as "in collection" on their credit reports, according to estimates by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Those debts add up to about $49 billion worth of charges.

This is a problem for several reasons. Almost no one chooses to run up large medical debts, which are often a result of unforeseeable crises and inadequate insurance.

In addition, medical billing is notoriously confusing. Patients often get multiple bills and insurance forms for the same visit. Inaccuracies are common.

Yet a credit score lowered due to medical debt can hurt one's ability to get affordable loans or insurance, rent an apartment, or land a job–even though research has shown that medical billing data on a credit report is less predictive of future repayment than the more conventional, nonmedical credit data that typically appears on credit reports.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR has long urged state and federal policymakers to ban medical debt from consumer credit reports. New York and Connecticut passed such bans with CR's support in 2023. And in June, the CFPB proposed a rule that would effectively prohibit medical debts from being listed on credit reports nationwide. The bureau projects that Americans with medical debt on their reports will see their credit scores rise by an average of 20 points if the rule is finalized.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Check out our step-by-step guide on what to do if you're contacted by a collection agent about medical debt, at CR.org/meddebttips.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

Our July 2024 cover story, **"Cable vs. Streaming: Watch Everything for Less,"** gave CR's expert advice on the best ways to save money–and still get all the channels you love. Our readers shared their thoughts and questions. To add yours, head to **CR.org/cableorstreaming**.

I WAS EXCITED when I saw your article on cable vs. streaming, since I know nothing about how to stream. I have no idea how to get streaming started, how to use it, or where to find it. I never thought streaming was a possibility for me because I record most of the shows I watch. I was pleased to learn from your article that there can be "a generous DVR feature to record shows," but that was never mentioned again, not even on the comparison charts, so I only know it may be available. Would you consider offering people like me more basic information?
–Carol Gesalman, Grand Junction, CO

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's easy to still have a DVR feature. Assuming you already have internet service, there are a number of live streaming services, such as DirecTV Stream, Fubo, Hulu + Live TV, Sling TV, and YouTube TV, that can provide local broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) plus cable channels. They can replicate much of what you'd get with a traditional cable TV plan. All of these include a cloud DVR–meaning it's web-based rather than a hard drive in a cable box–for recording shows. Go to the websites of these services to make sure they have all the shows you want to watch. (Not all the local channels are available on all the services. Sling TV doesn't offer CBS, for example. But they all offer packages with various premium channels.) Most offer a free trial period, so that's a great place to start. After that, there's no contract, so you're locked in only for a month at a time, allowing you to try other services to find the right fit. To use any service, you'll either need a smart TV or a streaming media player–such as an Amazon Fire TV, an Apple TV, or a Roku–that connects to your TV via an HDMI cable.*

THE REPORT ON CABLE TV vs. streaming was enlightening. However, all of the services have become rip-offs.[Watching sports is difficult.] In Atlanta, for example, you cannot view the Braves live unless you have Bally Sports. That is simply ridiculous. Combining different streaming entertainment services can cost as much as a car payment! All national sports should be free, live, and in color, and available to every home on at least one network–not a repeat at 2 a.m. on Tuesday after the second moon of the month.
–James Maucere, Peachtree City, GA

EDITOR'S NOTE *We feel your pain. Sports fans can find themselves flipping among different channels, networks, and streaming services to watch all the games and matches they want to see. Braves games, for example, are also available on DirecTV Stream and Fubo live streaming, and possibly on the MLB app, but it's expensive to pay for them all and tough to figure out where each event is being shown. (We wrote about this frustration recently; go to* ***CR.org/tvsports****.) There's no easy, cost-effective work-around at this point–but we'll let you know as soon as we find one.*

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

STORING GRANOLA

REGARDING "Some Very Good News About Granola" in the July issue: Interesting granola choices, although you didn't list my favorite, From the Fields', which I can order online. I'm wondering: How do you recommend storing granola? Since I buy it in bulk, I keep it in airtight containers in the fridge or freezer.
–Tom Lederer, El Cerrito, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Storing granola in an airtight container at room temp should keep it fresh and crunchy for at least two to three months. If you buy more than you can use in that time, freezing it, also in an airtight container, is a good way to extend the shelf life.*

PAPER TOWEL OPTIONS

"THE BEST PAPER TOWELS" in the July issue did not say anything about purchasing 100 percent post-consumer recycled products. I only purchase paper towels, toilet paper, napkins, and facial tissues that are made from recycled paper. They may not score the best in your evaluations, but the difference is likely minimal. We need to be supporting these products along with bamboo and other alternatives. They're easy to find and the prices will probably come down and the products will improve if more people purchase them.
–Jerry Digilio, Oak Park, IL

EDITOR'S NOTE *You're right that unlike many other paper products, paper towels typically get tossed into the trash (as opposed to a recycling bin) when they're dirty and so end up in a landfill. We've looked at reusable paper towels made from a host of recycled or sustainable materials, including cotton, polyester, viscose, and cellulose. A majority are either biodegradable or compostable, but a handful of them aren't, which offsets their environmental benefits once they eventually end up in a landfill. One of the better solutions we've found are reusable washcloths, like Utopia Towels (available on Amazon for $40 for a 60-pack). They're highly absorbent, and at 12 inches square, they're the perfect size for wiping up spills or drying hands. When washcloths get dirty, you can toss them in with your laundry. (We suggest white cloths that are safe to bleach if you want to sanitize them.) For more options, go to* ***CR.org/paperalternatives.***

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LEASING VS. BUYING A CAR

ONE POINT that was not mentioned in July's "Should You Lease Your Next Car?" is that some states charge sales tax on the full price of the car when you're leasing it. This means you've actually paid sales tax on the residual value of it. Once you turn it in and the dealer sells the car to the next person, that person will pay sales tax again.
–Perry Szarka, Sugar Hill, GA

EDITOR'S NOTE *State rules on taxing leases vary. Some states don't have any sales tax, while others collect tax on the depreciated amount and some collect taxes on the vehicle's full value. These taxes are paid by the lessor—the company that's leasing the car—and the costs are passed on to the consumer. That's why it's important when buying or leasing a car to understand the full costs. Otherwise, you risk getting an expensive surprise when taxes and other fees are added to the purchase order and payment schedule. In some areas, there may be annual taxes to pay on a vehicle as well, based on its value.*

COOLING WITH CEILING FANS

I was surprised that July's "Stay Cool—Even in Extreme Heat" didn't mention ceiling fans. They use less power than air conditioning and can reduce the need for A/C.
—John Hule, Athens, GA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Ceiling fans are an efficient option. The breeze from them can help you feel up to 4° F cooler. That may not be enough on very hot days, but if you have A/C, you can set your thermostat higher and stay comfortable. According to Energy Star, by raising your thermostat by only 2 degrees and using a ceiling fan, you can lower cooling costs by up to 14 percent. Our top-rated fans are the MinkaAire Light Wave 52", $360, and the Westinghouse Comet Indoor 52", $134.*

TIPPING HABITS

YOUR INTERESTING July article "Do You Really Need to Tip Them?" did not mention some people whom I regularly tip. During the holidays, I give the mail carrier, waste collectors, and local post office a tip. I also tip the grocery store bagger who helps me put my groceries in the car. I remember a time in 1969 when my well-to-do uncle tipped the service station mechanic $20 for changing his flat tire. I was astonished by his generosity and have used it as a guideline for tipping throughout my life. Almost anyone who provides a labor-intensive service with goodwill gets a tip from me, expected or not. And I always send a thank you note to anyone who has provided me a service with which I am pleased. Some places read those notes to the entire crew at office meetings, boosting their value to the recipient and making those notes worth far more than a monetary tip!
–Shireen Blair, Riva, MD

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Laptops

WE TESTED: 217 models
WE TEST FOR: Performance while running a variety of tasks; battery life; the quality of the screen, including size, clarity, and color; keyboard ergonomics; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 71
Range: 33-90

LARGE DISPLAY & LIGHTWEIGHT
LG Gram 17 (2024)
$1,600

88 OVERALL SCORE

SMALL, WITH A TOUCHSCREEN
Samsung Galaxy Book4 Pro 14"
$1,450

82 OVERALL SCORE

SUPERIOR BATTERY LIFE
MSI Prestige 16
$1,200

80 OVERALL SCORE

Black-and-White Laser Printers

WE TESTED: 60 models
WE TEST FOR: Speed and quality of printing graphics and text. We also estimate a printer's ink costs per year.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 54-85

SPEEDY & GOOD AT GRAPHICS
Canon imageClass LBP246dw
$200

79 OVERALL SCORE

COMPACT & A RELIABLE BRAND
Brother HL-L2370DW
$230

73 OVERALL SCORE

CRISP TEXT QUALITY FOR LESS
Canon imageClass LBP122dw
$100

73 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

Does anyone need a printer anymore?

IN A WORLD where so many things are digital–including concert, movie, and plane tickets–an at-home printer may seem unnecessary. But even if you use it less frequently these days, there are still times when a printer is a great convenience. You may need one to print a document that requires a signature with a pen. While most of us don't need a high-capacity printer anymore, a smaller model such as the Brother above can handle basic tasks without taking up much space. Laser printers are among the most reliable and cost-effective options because they use toner instead of pricey ink. For convenience, the printers shown above support Apple AirPrint, letting you print directly from an iPhone.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

WORSE – BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org.**

Toasters

WE TESTED: 71 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a toaster can make light and dark toast, how quickly it can toast a full batch of bread, ease of use and cleaning, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 77
Range: 54-92

TOPS FOR TOASTING
Breville A Bit More BTA720XL 2-Slice
$90

92 OVERALL SCORE

QUICK TOASTING FOR LESS
Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19039
$40

91 OVERALL SCORE

FITS 4 SLICES & EASY TO USE
Haden Brighton
$75

81 OVERALL SCORE

Chainsaws

WE TESTED: 88 models
WE TEST FOR: How fast a chainsaw can cut through a 10-inch-square oak beam, how safe it is, how easy it is to use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 69
Range: 34-82

BEST BATTERY-POWERED
Ego CS1804
$400

82 OVERALL SCORE

BEST GAS-POWERED
Echo CS-590-20
$450

77 OVERALL SCORE

BEST CORDED ELECTRIC
Stihl MS 170 C-BQ
$430

68 OVERALL SCORE

Bike Helmets

WE TESTED: 101 adult models
WE TEST FOR: The ability of a helmet to absorb the impact in a crash, ventilation, fit adjustments, and ease of use.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 71
Range: 35-90

BEST & EASY TO ADJUST
Trek Starvos WaveCel
$105

90 OVERALL SCORE

RUNNER-UP
Bell Formula LED Mips Ghost
$140

86 OVERALL SCORE

SAFE BARGAIN BUY
Lazer Tempo KinetiCore
$50

85 OVERALL SCORE

Ellipticals

WE TESTED: 32 models
WE TEST FOR: Construction, including noise, feel, and ride; how easy the controls, display, and exercise programs are to use; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 41-77

EXCELLENT ERGONOMICS & TRACKS HEART RATE
Vision S7100HRT
$3,200

77 OVERALL SCORE

TRACKS HEART RATE FOR LESS
Schwinn 430
$1,000

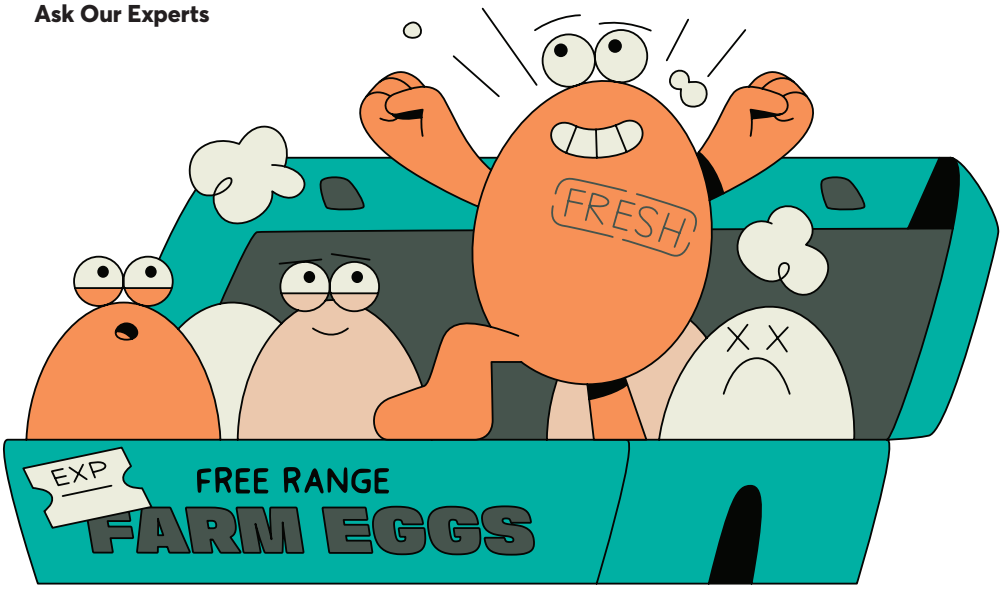
72 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE (BUT NO HEART RATE TRACKING)
Horizon Fitness EX 59
$700

63 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Toilets & More



Can I use eggs that are past their expiration date?

EGG CARTONS typically come stamped with dates labeled "EXP" (for expiration), "best by," or "sell by," depending on state regulations. But these dates usually refer to when the eggs are past peak quality rather than being unsafe to eat. "Eggs won't develop salmonella or other bacteria that cause food poisoning unless the bacteria were in there to begin with," says Sana Mujahid, PhD, manager of food safety research and testing at CR.

Unless the shell is cracked or the yolk is discolored or has an "off" smell, an egg past its expiration date is fine to use. Older eggs may be runnier than fresh ones, but they're still okay for baking or eating hard-boiled. (For the best taste, only use fresh eggs for dishes where they're the star, such as omelets or poached eggs.) You can determine how fresh eggs are by using the float test. Put an uncracked egg into a bowl of water. If it sinks and lies flat on the bottom, it's fresh. If it stands upright, it's older but still safe to use. A really old egg will float; to be safe, it's best to toss it.

To keep eggs as fresh as possible, store them in the fridge in their original carton between 37° F and 40° F. Don't keep them in the fridge door, where temperatures fluctuate. For longer storage, you can crack and freeze egg yolks and whites. Beat them together or freeze them separately. Whites freeze well, but yolks can become thick and syrupy, so mix the beaten eggs or yolks with some salt, sugar, or corn syrup to prevent thickening before freezing.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

I found a tick embedded in my leg and removed it. What should I do now?

BECAUSE THE TICK was embedded, it's possible that you could have been infected with one of several tick-borne illnesses, including Lyme disease (the most common) and babesiosis (which has been on the rise recently). Lyme disease, if left untreated, can lead to severe complications like brain inflammation and paralysis. Babesiosis can cause organ damage and is more dangerous for older adults and those who are immunocompromised.

Your first step after removal should be to clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol or soap and water. In most cases, the only other thing you should do is watch for symptoms over the next few weeks and go to your doctor if you experience a fever, joint or muscle pain, or a rash. Most tick-borne diseases can be easily treated with antibiotics soon after symptoms arise.

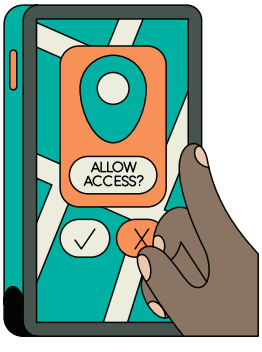
An exception: See your doctor right away if you remove a tick that's swollen (not flat) and you think you were bitten in a geographical location (like the Northeastern U.S.) where blacklegged ticks—which often carry Lyme—are common. (Go to cdc.gov for a map of all high-risk regions.) In that instance, your doctor might choose to give you a preventive dose of the antibiotic doxycycline, which can keep Lyme disease from developing if given within 72 hours of the bite. To help you assess whether you might need medical care after a tick bite, you can use an online tool at cdc.gov/ticks/after-a-tick-bite.

Some phone apps ask for access to my location or other info. Should I say yes?

IT DEPENDS. An app might ask for access to data because it's necessary for it to function. For example, a photo-sharing app needs to use your camera and a mapping app needs to know your location. But some apps may be collecting data without actually needing it to work. That extra info about you may then be used to target you with ads.

To adjust or revoke the permissions of apps on iPhones, go to your Privacy & Security settings. (On Android phones, go to Permission Manager under Security & Privacy.) You'll see a list of functions. Tap on any one to get a look at the apps using it, and then move the setting to the "Off" position if you don't think an app needs that access.

Two important functions to check are Tracking and Location Services. With the first one, you can prevent app developers from monitoring your activity across other apps and websites they don't own. For the second, you can adjust the app's access to your device's location, denying it completely or allowing it only while using the app.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

CR Insights

PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

IN THE KNOW

A Healthier, Tastier Burger

It's okay to eat the beef—but surround it with some other, good-for-you stuff.

A Better Bun

White flour buns are low in fiber (the nutrient that keeps you feeling fuller longer). Instead, consider going for 100 percent whole-wheat buns, which have more fiber, tend to taste nuttier, and have fewer calories.

Top It Up

Swap out tasteless iceberg lettuce for a more nutritious and flavorful salad green like baby spinach. Add a slice of antioxidant-rich heirloom tomato and potassium-packed avocado, which can help lower blood pressure.

The Best Beef

The meat that is 80 percent lean and 20 percent fat makes for the juiciest burgers. But 90 percent lean ground beef will save you about 60 calories and 3 grams of fat per patty. Aim for 4- to 5-ounce patties.

Bring the Heat

For a perfectly cooked beef burger, make sure the inside reaches 160° F—the minimum temperature needed to kill off potentially harmful bacteria. Don't worry about dryness—you'll still end up with a juicy burger.

ThermoPro Digital Meat Thermometer (TP19H) $25

92 OVERALL SCORE

Don't Burn the Outside

Charring can cause compounds to form that might increase cancer risk. So keep the flame low, flip often, and finish over high heat. Mixing thyme, ginger, or garlic into your patty may also stop the compounds from forming.

Keep It Clean

When taking burgers off the grill, use a fresh plate. Don't reuse the dish you had the raw patties on earlier because it could have dangerous bacteria from the uncooked meat on it.

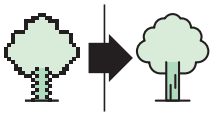
PHOTOS: JOE ST. PIERRE/STOCKSY (BURGER); CONSUMER REPORTS

TECH UPDATE

Quick Tricks for the Best TV Picture

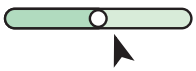
Adjusting these three settings on your big screen will improve your TV-watching experience in just 5 minutes.

Samsung QN65S90C
$1,600
85 OVERALL SCORE



Turn Off 'Noise Reduction'

Out of the box, many new TVs come with the noise reduction setting turned on. But you're likely to see a clearer image overall if you turn it off. Visual noise—sometimes called "snow" on account of the black and white dots in the picture—was a big issue with older analog TVs. It can still happen on some TVs if you're trying to stream content from a low-quality source, but for the most part, your modern TV is already giving you high-quality content. So these days, it's overkill because it smooths out details, leaving the picture looking out of focus.



Lower the Sharpness Setting

Believe it or not, dialing up the sharpness setting on your TV doesn't actually make the image sharper. It accentuates the edges of images but masks fine detail in the process—which can create a halo around objects. Manufacturers often have it turned up on new TVs. So toggle the sharpness setting on your TV way down or turn it off completely. Some TVs have a zero setting in the center of the control, while others may have a 50 in the center. Aim for that center point, which is the equivalent of "off." (Don't lower it beyond that center point or you might make the image fuzzier instead.)

Try Filmmaker Mode (If You Have It)

New sets from Hisense, LG, Vizio, and Samsung (like the highly rated model shown above) offer this setting, meant to help you get a picture that is movie-theater level. Filmmaker mode fine-tunes color settings and turns off motion blurring. This new setting has been widely praised by well-known directors like James Cameron, Patty Jenkins, and Christopher Nolan. And we agree: Turning on filmmaker mode comes pretty close to our expert recommendations for an optimized TV picture. One thing: You'll need to increase the TV's brightness if you're watching during the day.

ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (VITAMIN E); CONSUMER REPORTS

To see all of the adjustments that our experts advise making on your specific TV model, use our TV Screen Optimizer tool at CR.org/tvoptimizer.

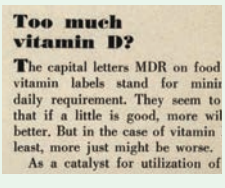
CR Time Traveler SUPPLEMENTS

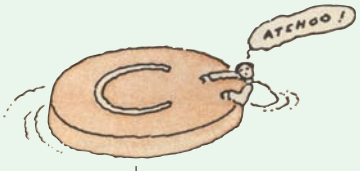
1938 CR reports that Sears has agreed to stop advertising vitamin E capsules with the false claim that the average American doesn't get an adequate amount of it in their diet.

1940 CR examines 220 bottled vitamins and finds that many tablets don't contain the amounts of the vitamins they are claimed to contain.

1951 CR's medical expert reveals the truth about this best-selling health book. They say that the book's information about vitamins and minerals "belongs on the fiction bestseller list."

1966 While vitamin D supplements become popular for bone health, CR cautions that excessive doses may actually weaken bones.


Too much vitamin D?
The capital letters MDR on food vitamin labels stand for minir daily requirement. They seem to that if a little is good, more wil better. But in the case of vitamin least, more just might be worse.
As a catalyst for utilization of



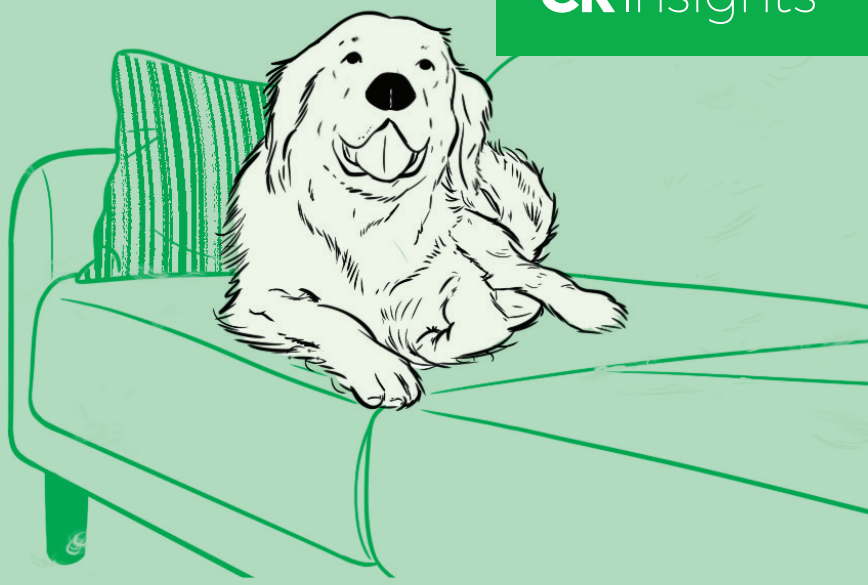
1976 CR investigates whether vitamin C tablets can cure a cold. We say they can't—but they may provide some slight relief.

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

HOW TO CLEAN PRACTICALLY ANYTHING™

Banish Annoying Lint & Pet Hair

They're notoriously tough to get rid of. Here, solutions for getting them out of hard-to-reach places.



75
OVERALL SCORE

CARPETS

Kenmore 200 Series BC4002 $220

Sucking up pet hair is difficult for many vacuums. That's why we rate vacuums for how well they do this icky job. The Kenmore's powerhead aced our test, deftly picking up 5 grams of long, feathery Maine Coon cat fur that had been stomped into a medium-pile carpet.

CLOTHING

Oxo Good Grips Reusable Lint Roller $11

This reusable tool is more cost-effective than disposable sticky lint rollers. "A few swipes over a black outfit was all it took to remove the lint from my clothes," says at-home tester Jodhaira Rodriguez. Plus, the roller has a "self-cleaning case" that pushes out trapped lint when you press the button.

YOUR DRYER

Hurricane Lint Lizard $30

Lint builds up in difficult-to-reach spots inside your dryer, like underneath the lint trap. The Lint Lizard, which fits onto the end of your vacuum, is a flexible tube that can get into small spaces and suck up the lint that collects in them.

FURNITURE

ChomChom Roller Pet Hair Remover $28

This lint brush is the only tool that—after just a few swipes—lifted all of the hairs off velvet and linen-polyester fabrics. The 7-inch roller is wide enough to tackle couches, and cleaning the tool is a breeze. The button on its handle opens an easy-to-empty hair-collecting compartment.

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (SHOPPER); CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

1986 We raise concerns about Kellogg's claims in ads for its All-Bran cereal that it may help prevent some cancers. We say this stretches the truth about the research in order to make a sale.

1994 We look at 84 supplements to see whether they contain what they say they do on their labels. Most do, but one product, Mega-Vites "75," falls short on iron, zinc, and more.

2006 The Dietary Supplement and Nonprescription Drug Consumer Protection Act is signed into law by President George W. Bush. It mandates that companies report "serious adverse events" to the FDA.

2016 CR identifies 15 potentially harmful ingredients in supplements—sold by major retailers—which are linked to risks of cancer, organ damage, and more.

2024 We examine anti-aging supplements that may benefit health, including bone-strengthening. These Kirkland calcium tablets are third-party verified, meaning they were tested for certain contaminants.

Kirkland Signature (Costco) 600 mg Calcium With D3
$13.99/500 ct.

For our latest review of anti-aging supplements, turn to page 24 in this issue.

AUTO UPDATE

Cars With the Best MPG

Whether gas prices go up or down, a fuel-efficient vehicle will always save you money. But what's a good number when it comes to gas mileage these days? The answer can vary widely by car type. What follows: Fourteen autos, including some surprisingly efficient SUVs, trucks, and sports cars, that get the most miles per gallon in their respective categories. And we don't just take the window stickers' word for it–the overall gas mileages listed here are derived from our own tests that are based on a mix of city and highway driving.

Some of the most efficient models are hybrids, which conserve gas by combining an engine with an electric motor and battery pack. But some gas-only vehicles, like the midsized SUVs shown here, now offer good fuel economy for their size. We've even found better choices if you want a sports car: The Mazda MX-5 Miata above, for example, offers a stellar 34 mpg overall–well beyond other sports cars, which can be as poor as 19 or 20 mpg.

MPG

51

48

44

42

40

37

34

32

31

24

23

COMPACT SEDAN
Hyundai Elantra Hybrid Blue
77 OVERALL SCORE

COMPACT HATCHBACK
Toyota Prius (AWD)
80 OVERALL SCORE

MIDSIZED SEDAN
Hyundai Sonata Hybrid
72 OVERALL SCORE

MIDSIZED SEDAN
Honda Accord Hybrid Sport
89 OVERALL SCORE

LUXURY SEDAN
Lexus ES 300h
88 OVERALL SCORE

SPORTS CAR
Mazda MX-5 Miata
80 OVERALL SCORE

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUV
Lexus RX 350h
88 OVERALL SCORE

MIDSIZED SUV
Toyota Venza
79 OVERALL SCORE

PICKUP TRUCK
Ford Maverick Hybrid
77 OVERALL SCORE

LUXURY CAR HATCHBACK
Acura Integra A-Spec
71 OVERALL SCORE

SPORTS CAR
Honda Civic Si
71 OVERALL SCORE

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUV
BMW X5 xDrive40i
92 OVERALL SCORE

PICKUP TRUCK
Hyundai Santa Cruz Turbo
74 OVERALL SCORE

MIDSIZED SUV
Subaru Outback Turbo
79 OVERALL SCORE

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

Note: We did not include plug-in hybrids or electric vehicles in our selection.

Solar-Powered Pathway Lights

A well-lit pathway is absolutely vital for your safety–and solar-powered stake lights (aka landscape lights) offer a low-cost, hassle-free way to illuminate your walkways and driveway at night. Sold in sets, these lights are easily staked into loose dirt and then recharge their own batteries during the day by soaking up the sun. When night falls, the best solar lights automatically turn on and stay on until dawn.

Our testing of 11 light sets revealed that not all perform this job equally well. While some were easy to install and stayed nicely lit, like the Lerekam Solar Spot Light, at right, others at the bottom of our ratings struggled to charge or didn't last the night. One important tip: Consider models with an on/off switch. Turning off lights when you don't need them can help recharge the battery more fully.

Lerekam Solar Spot Light $100

- 5/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 5/5 EASE OF USE
- ✓ ON/OFF BUTTON

91 OVERALL SCORE

Harbor Breeze Solar LED Path Light $30

- 5/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 3/5 EASE OF USE
- ✓ ON/OFF BUTTON

78 OVERALL SCORE

Gigalumi Grid Solar Pathway Lights $20

- 4/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 4/5 EASE OF USE
- ✓ ON/OFF BUTTON

73 OVERALL SCORE

Frontgate Pro Series VI Solar Path Light $101

- 3/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 4/5 EASE OF USE
- ✓ ON/OFF BUTTON

65 OVERALL SCORE

Incx Solar Pathway Lights $31

- 4/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 4/5 EASE OF USE
- ✓ ON/OFF BUTTON

63 OVERALL SCORE

Gigalumi Solar Pathway Lights $21

- 4/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 4/5 EASE OF USE
- ✓ ON/OFF BUTTON

62 OVERALL SCORE

Linkind StarRay Solar Spot Light $77

- 3/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 4/5 EASE OF USE
- ✓ ON/OFF BUTTON

58 OVERALL SCORE

InnoGear Solar Lights 2in1 Waterproof Outdoor Landscape Lighting SL406W $43

- 3/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 4/5 EASE OF USE
- ✓ ON/OFF BUTTON

58 OVERALL SCORE

Threshold (Target) Window Lantern Solar LED Outdoor Path Light $45

- 3/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 3/5 EASE OF USE
- X ON/OFF BUTTON

56 OVERALL SCORE

Hampton Bay Mitchell Outdoor Solar Path Light $60

- 3/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 3/5 EASE OF USE
- X ON/OFF BUTTON

52 OVERALL SCORE

Bell + Howell Solar LED Outdoor Path Light $50

- 3/5 LIGHT DURATION
- 4/5 EASE OF USE
- X ON/OFF BUTTON

49 OVERALL SCORE

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

COUNTERTOP INTELLIGENCE

Make Great Iced Coffee

BREW IT YOURSELF

These easy-to-use countertop brewers are specifically designed to make cold coffees.

74 OVERALL SCORE

FOR ICED COFFEE

K-Iced Single Serve Coffee Maker $85

This slim brewer is fast. All you have to do is add water to the reservoir, place a pod in the filter basket, close it, and press the "brew" button. The iced setting makes refreshing coffee that isn't too acidic when poured over ice.

78 OVERALL SCORE

FOR COLD BREW

Primula Burke Cold Brew Coffee Maker $35

This method—which requires steeping coffee grounds in cold water for 12 to 24 hours—makes a smooth coffee without the bitterness. The Primula is the best cold brewer we've tested.

BUY IT

Prefer the convenience of store-bought coffee? These are some of our favorite bottled cold brews.

TOP PICK

Chameleon Organic Cold Brew, Black Coffee $4 (10 ounces)

Chameleon's bottled coffee is a crowd-pleaser. Staffers said it is light- to medium-bodied, with low acidity. It's fine to drink black, though it pairs nicely with milk, too. At 40 cents per ounce, it's the priciest bottled cold brew we tried.

TASTY BARGAIN BUY

La Colombe Unsweetened Brazilian Coffee Cold Brew $6.50 (42 ounces)

La Colombe's brew is medium-bodied, with low acidity and a chocolatey flavor. Most of our staffers gave it high marks with and without milk. It was also one of the least pricey cold brews we tried.

AVOID WATERY BREW

Two smart ways to keep your iced coffee cold for hours—and also strong.

94 OVERALL SCORE

KEEP IT COLD MUCH LONGER

Zojirushi 16-oz. Stainless Steel Travel Mug $29

This leakproof travel mug kept drinks cold for an impressive 7½ hours—more than any other insulated mug we tested. The screw-on cap is easy to clean, and our testers found the mug easy to open with one hand.

MAKE COFFEE ICE CUBES

Oxo Ice Cube Tray Set $10 for 2

Pour your leftover coffee into an ice cube tray and freeze it for a less diluted iced coffee the next day. This Oxo is a CR favorite and didn't give the ice a plastic flavor. The cubes release easily from the tray, and the lid makes for easy stacking in your freezer.

PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (LA COLOMBE); MANUFACTURERS

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

CHRYSLER MINIVANS, SUVs, AND TRUCKS

Chrysler is recalling 1,033,433 minivans, SUVs, and trucks from the 2021 to 2023 model years because of a potential safety risk when backing up. The vehicle's media screen may not display the view behind the vehicle when in Reverse, due to radio signal issues.
What to do Chrysler dealers will update the radio software to fix the problem, free of charge. Owners who already paid to have this work performed before the recall was issued may be able to seek reimbursement from Chrysler. Owners of affected vehicles will be contacted by Chrysler by mail but can also call the automaker at 800-853-1403. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 24V436000, and Chrysler's own number is 66B.

MGA MINIVERSE MAKE IT MINI TOY SETS

MGA Entertainment is recalling about 21 million Miniverse Make It Mini Sets. They contain resins that, when liquid, can cause skin, eye, and respiratory irritation or sensitization when inhaled, touched, or ingested. After the resins cure, they no longer present this hazard. The sets were sold at Aldi, Dollar General, Family Dollar, Hobby Lobby, Target, Walmart, and other stores nationwide and online at Amazon, shop.mgae.com, target.com, walmart.com, and other sites from October 2022 through June 2024 for $7 to $52.
What to do Stop using the sets with any unused resins. Call MGA at 800-222-4685 or go to mgae.com/customer-care/recalls for instructions and to get a full refund or replacement product.

BASEUS MAGNETIC WIRELESS CHARGING POWER BANKS

Baseus is recalling about 132,000 power banks because the lithium-ion battery in the power bank can overheat, posing a fire hazard. The power banks were sold online at aliexpress.com, Amazon, and baseus.com from April 2022 through April 2024 for $18 to $55.
What to do Stop using the recalled power banks and dispose of the battery in accordance with local and state regulations. Call Baseus at 855-215-5824, email at care@baseus.com, or go to baseuspowerbankrecall.expertinquiry.com for a full refund with proof of purchase or a $36 cash refund without proof.

VITAMIX BLENDING CONTAINERS AND BLADE BASES

Vitamix is recalling about 569,000 blending containers and blade bases because the containers can separate from the blade base, exposing the blades and posing a laceration hazard. They were sold at Best Buy, Costco, Crate & Barrel, Macy's, Target, Walmart, Williams Sonoma, and other stores nationwide and online at Amazon, qvc.com, and vitamix.com from April 2017 through May 2024 for $30 to $990.
What to do Stop using the blending containers and blade bases. Call Vitamix at 855-215-5178 or go to blendingcupbowlrecall.expertinquiry.com for details, a free repair kit, and instructions.

CINMAR CHAISE LOUNGE CHAIRS

Cinmar is recalling about 70,000 chaise lounge chairs because the adjustable backrest can unexpectedly descend with force, posing finger crushing and amputation hazards. The chairs were sold at Frontgate stores in Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas and online at frontgate.com and in Frontgate catalogs from February 2014 through December 2023 for $600 to $1,400.
What to do Stop using the chairs. Call Cinmar at 888-298-4651 or go to frontgate.com/newportchaiserecall for a repair kit and instructions, free of charge.

REI CHILDREN'S BICYCLES WITH TRAINING WHEELS

REI is recalling about 75,860 Co-op Cycles Rev kids' bicycles because the training wheel assembly knob can loosen and detach from the bicycle, posing a hazard to riders. The bikes were sold at REI stores nationwide and at rei.com from March 2022 through May 2024 for about $200 to $300.
What to do Stop using the bike if the training wheels are on. Contact your local REI store to schedule a free repair that includes replacement training wheel attachments. If the bicycle is being ridden without training wheels, it can continue to be used as is.

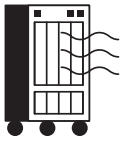
ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS: CPSC (VITAMIX)

SEPTEMBER IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

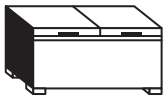
GRILLS

LAWN MOWERS

AIR PURIFIERS



FREEZERS



PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

The Best Pillows From Our Tests

The right choice can help you sleep better and wake up pain-free. Use our guide to find your match.

by Tanya A. Christian

TOP-RATED CUSTOMIZABLE STYLE

Coop Sleep Goods The Original $75

90 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT CONTOURED MEMORY FOAM

BedInABox Tranquillium Contour Pillow $89

75 OVERALL SCORE

TOP FEATHER-FILLED

Ikea Lundtrav, High $28

68 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREGORY REID

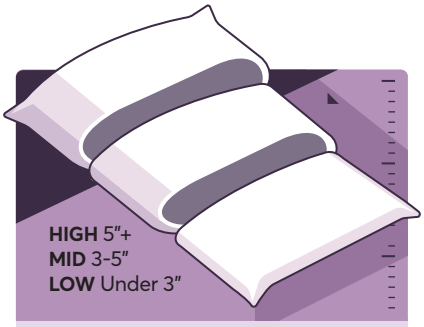
DOES YOUR PILLOW look as flat as a pancake? Is it lumpy? Do you find yourself fluffing it up all night? And do you wake up with a sore neck or upper back pain? If you answered yes to any of these questions, it's probably time to find something better. But you'll see there's a dizzying array of pillows online and in stores. (What makes a pillow dust-mite-resistant or cooling, and what the heck is a filling called kapok, anyway?)

The right pillow should keep your upper body and spine aligned. It will also help your body maintain the ideal temperature needed for restful sleep, and it won't trigger allergies. If your pillow doesn't check those boxes, it's time to find one that will. Here's what to know before you shop.

How thick should your pillow be?

The position you sleep in—back, side, stomach, or a combo—and how soft your mattress is should determine how thick or firm your pillow should be. A pillow's thickness, or "loft," comes down to the amount of filling inside—and the right loft will support your neck and keep your spine aligned as you sleep. While there's no one-size-fits-all rule, you'll know you've found the correct loft when your neck is in a neutral position. That means the neck and spine are horizontal, with shoulders and hips stacked for side sleepers, and for back sleepers, the shoulders aligned with the hips and the neck with the spine, says Nimira Alibhoy, DC, a chiropractor in Agoura Hills, Calif.

Pillow lovers take note: A decorative stack is fine during the day, but sleep experts agree that you should use a single pillow at night. If you have more than one, you may be cranking your neck upward all night, and that won't be helpful, Alibhoy says. And never sleep with your shoulders on the pillow. "If you're on your back, pull the ends, or 'wings,' of the pillow out from below the shoulders," she says. "If you're on your side, make sure it's tucked under the neck." With this in mind, choose a sleeping pillow with the right thickness for your sleep style. Firmness, determined by the type and density of the filling inside, is important, too. For more on fillings, see pages 20 and 21.



CHECK THE LOFT

You want your spine and neck to stay in what's known as a neutral angle as you sleep, according to the American Chiropractic Association. For side sleepers, your pillow should maintain the neck and spine alignment in a straight line. When sleeping on your back, use a pillow that supports your head and maintains the normal cervical C-shaped curve.

Match your pillow to your sleep style

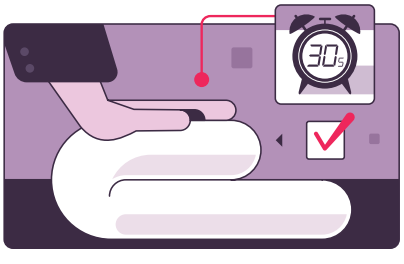
The right thickness and firmness for you depends on your body's position:

➔ **Back sleepers** need a supportive pillow that cradles the head without disrupting the natural curve of the neck. Medium-loft pillows, between 3 and 5 inches thick, are best.

➔ **Side sleepers** should have a firm or extra-firm pillow. High-loft pillows, 5 inches thick or more, are best because they maintain the right alignment, or curve, of the neck and head.

➔ **Stomach sleepers** need a pillow that keeps their face close to the mattress so that the neck isn't angled up away from the spine, or they can skip the pillow altogether. In general, low-loft pillows, up to 3 inches thick, are best for them.

➔ **Combination-style sleepers** should choose a pillow that has softer and firmer sections, or those that are thinner in the center (for back sleeping) and higher on the sides (for side sleeping). You can find pillows in many different shapes, like the BedInABox Tranquillium Contour Pillow, $89, or achieve a similar effect with an adjustable pillow like the Coop Sleep Goods The Original, $75, which allows you to remove and reposition the filling as needed. (Both are shown on the facing page.)



TIME TO REPLACE IT? TAKE THE PILLOW TEST.

Most experts recommend that you swap out your pillow every one to two years. But if you're having a hard time deciding if your pillow is past its prime, there are easy ways to know for sure.

If your pillow has loose filling, place it on a flat surface and fold it in half. Next, press down on the pillow anywhere from 30 seconds to a minute. Then let go. If your pillow immediately springs back, it still has life left in it. If it remains folded, it's time for a new one. Slab-style pillows can flatten over time; replace yours when the pillow no longer supports your head and keeps shoulders aligned.

PHOTOS: PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (THIS SPREAD, LEFT, AND FOLLOWING SPREAD, BOTTOM LEFT). PHOTOS, FOLLOWING SPREAD: TEMPUR-PEDIC; CONSUMER REPORTS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GUILHERME HENRIQUE

Choose Your Filling

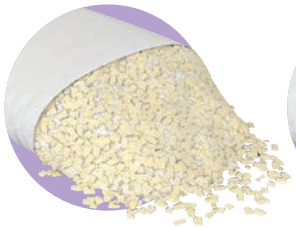
You can find pillows with most of the popular filling types in our ratings starting on page 22. (CR has not tested water-filled or buckwheat pillows.) Each type has a distinctive feel. Polyester is lightweight and plush, while solid-slab memory foam pillows can feel weighty and firm. Down is soft and fluffy; latex is springy and a little bouncy.

"The feel is really a matter of personal preference," says Angela Holliday-Bell, MD, a certified sleep specialist in Chicago. She advises back sleepers to pick a medium-firm material. Latex, memory foam, or a down alternative will often fit the bill. Stomach sleepers may prefer more compressible fillings like feathers or down. Side sleepers can benefit from firmer memory foam.

Also consider breathability (how well

POLYESTER

It's one of the most common types CR tests and often the least expensive. But polyester pillows are typically less supportive than other types, and they don't hold their shape well. And they accumulate dust-mite allergens at a rate faster than feather pillows. Most are machine-washable.

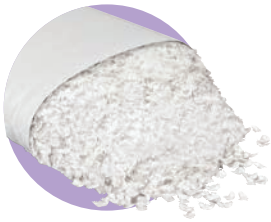


MEMORY FOAM

Shredded (shown) and slab-style options both conform to your head and hold their shape well. Many are very supportive. They're less likely to trigger allergies than some other materials. But they can trap heat, and they aren't easily machine-washable. You can wash the cover (if it's removable); spot-clean the foam inside.

LATEX

You'll see natural and synthetic options. Both are generally considered asthma- and allergy-friendly—unless you have a latex allergy. They tend to be quite breathable (a good choice if you sleep hot), they contour to your head, and they hold their shape well. Latex pillows should only be spot-cleaned.



DOWN/FEATHER

Usually made from goose or duck down, these pillows are quite soft and fluffy but can easily get flattened with use. Be prepared to fluff regularly. Though quite breathable, the fill can trigger symptoms in those with an allergy to down. Most down pillows are machine-washable.

BUCKWHEAT

This filling is breathable but noisy. (You'll hear a rustling sound as the pillow moves.) It conforms to your head and neck and holds its shape. The pillows aren't particularly allergy-friendly. And cleaning them takes some effort: You'll have to remove the hulls from the casing and air them in the sun, and wash the casing in cold water.

Good Picks for Better Nights

It's easy to choose a great pillow that matches your sleep needs.

IF YOU WAKE UP HOT AND SWEATY

GhostBed Shredded *(memory foam, customizable)*
$190 for a 2-pack

80 OVERALL SCORE

IF YOU LIKE SOMETHING FIRM

Avocado Green *(latex and kapok)*
$129

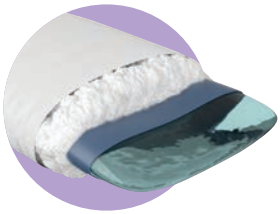
71 OVERALL SCORE

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

the material allows moisture to dissipate); washability, how supportive it is (see our ratings on page 22), whether it's asthma- and allergy-friendly (meaning it prevents the accumulation of dust mites), and how well the material contours to your head and holds its shape.

KAPOK

This featherlike fiber made from the seed pods of the kapok tree is a vegan alternative to down. Kapok-filled pillows are breathable and tend to be soft. Some research suggests that they accumulate dust mites faster than memory foam. They don't hold their shape very well, so they're best for stomach sleepers. Spot-clean the cover.



WATER-FILLED

These customizable pillows let you adjust the firmness by changing how much water is in the inner removable bag. While water fillers do conform to the head well, they're also prone to leaking. Avoid them unless advised by a medical professional. The pillow cover is usually machine-washable.

IF YOU WANT SOMETHING SOFT & SQUISHY

Rest Haven Memory Foam *(memory foam)*
$25 for a 2-pack

71 OVERALL SCORE

SHOPPING FOR A PILLOW

We recommend heading to a walk-in store. Take a tape measure to help you find choices that fit your sleep style. Many mattress showrooms offer pillow "fittings," where you can lie down with a pillow, much as you would while mattress shopping. Sales associates in stores like Mattress Firm, Saatva, and Sleep Number, all of which sell pillows, can help check your alignment and provide recommendations. For the most accurate pillow test, try to lie on a mattress similar in firmness to the one you have at home.

Before heading to a store like HomeGoods or Target, you can do your own assessment. Get a sense of how thick your new pillow should be to offer proper support. (You can experiment with pillows or even folded towels, then measure the most comfortable thickness.) Pillow packaging usually provides measurements and the level of firmness. But terms like "firm" and "medium firm" are not standard. Do a quick "squeeze" test to check the firmness. Place the pillow on a flat surface and compress it to about half its original thickness. The more pressure you have to apply, the firmer it is. Next, fluff to see if it returns to its original shape. Finally, look for indicators of quality: neat stitches, straight seams, and piping on the cover.

If you can't get to a store, here's some advice for buying online:

- **Look for a generous return policy.** Many brands offer the option to try a pillow at home before deciding to keep it for the long haul. A trial period of 30 days or more is ideal.
- **Read the description carefully.** This is where you'll find details about the filling type, loft, washability, and any certifications.
- **Pick a pillow you can customize.** Adjustable pillows allow you to remove, sometimes add, and reposition filling to fit your needs. Manufacturers typically include a guide with instructions for each sleep style.

How Much Does a Good Pillow Cost?

GREAT NEWS: CR's pillow testing shows that expensive doesn't always mean better. You can find a supportive, high-quality option for a far-less-than-premium price.

PRICEY PILLOW

Tempur-Pedic Tempur-Cloud Breeze Dual Cooling $150

72 OVERALL SCORE

It's from a famous brand and is very supportive for side sleepers. But this gel memory foam pillow is just so-so for back sleepers, and not very breathable.

DREAMY PICK

Weekender Gel Memory Foam Pillow $32

78 OVERALL SCORE

Our top gel memory foam pillow is not quite as good for side sleepers as the Tempur-Pedic, but its breathability and price make it a solid choice.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GRAHAM MURDOCH

Ratings › **Sleeping Beauties** The best pillows in our tests offer good support for different sleep styles, spring back into shape after use, and help you stay cool and comfortable all night long.

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features				
			Side support	Back support	Resilience	Use and preference	Breathability	Type	Washable	Memory foam	Cooling properties	Retains warmth
PILLOWS												
Coop Sleep Goods The Original	90	$75	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	⌃	Memory foam and microfiber	Yes	●		●
Sleep Number ComfortFit Ultimate	85	$140	⇈	⇈	–	⇈	⇈	Blend of memory foam pieces and down-alternative fibers	Cover only	●		●
GhostBed Shredded (2-pack)	80	$190	⇈	⇈	–	⇈	⇈	Shredded memory foam pieces and polyester gel fiber	Outer, inner covers only	●	●	●
Tuft & Needle Original Foam	79	$100	⇈	–	⇈	⇈	⇈	Polyurethane foam	Cover only			
Weekender Gel Memory Foam	78	$32	⌃	–	⇈	⌃	⇈	Polyurethane foam	Cover only	●	●	
BedInABox Tranquillium Contour	75	$89	⇈	⌃	⇈	–	⇈	Polyurethane foam and memory foam	Cover only	●		
Comfort Revolution Blue Bubble Gel	73	$60	⇈	–	⇈	⇈	⌄	Polyurethane foam with gel pad	Cover only	●	●	
Tempur-Pedic Tempur-Cloud Breeze Dual Cooling	72	$150	⇈	–	⇈	⌃	⌄	Visco elastic polyurethane (memory foam) and gel	Cover only	●	●	
Brooklyn Bedding Talalay Latex High Loft	72	$89	⌃	⌄	⌃	⇈	⇈	Latex foam	Cover only			
Sealy Memory Foam Gel	71	$40	⇈	–	⌃	⇈	⌄	Polyurethane foam pad	Cover only	●	●	
Rest Haven Memory Foam (2-pack)	71	$25	⇈	–	⌃	⌃	⇈	Shredded memory foam pieces	Spot-clean only	●		
Avocado Green	71	$129	⇈	⇈	⇊	⌃	⇈	Latex and kapok	Cover only			●
Ikea Lundtrav, High	68	$28	⇈	⌃	⇊	⌃	⇈	Feathers and down	Yes			●
My Pillow Premium	68	$50	⇈	–	–	–	⇈	Shredded polyurethane foam	Yes			●
Beckham Luxury Linens Hotel Collection (2-pack)	67	$60	⇈	⇈	–	–	⇈	Polyester gel fiber	Yes		●	●
Puredown Goose Down Feather Classic White (2-pack)	67	$51	⇈	–	–	⌃	⇈	Feather and down	Yes			
Malouf Z by Malouf Zoned 100% Talalay Latex High Loft Plush	67	$136	⇈	⌃	⌄	⌃	⇈	Latex foam rubber	Cover only			●
Boll & Branch Down Alternative Medium	66	$98	⇈	⌃	⇊	⇈	⇈	Feathers and down	Yes			
Casper Essential	64	$45	⌃	–	–	⇈	⇈	Polyester fiber	Dry-clean only			
Casper Original Pillow	63	$65	⌃	–	⌄	⌃	⇈	Polyester fiber	Yes			
Saatva Latex	63	$165	⇈	⌃	⇊	⇈	⇈	Polyester fiber/shredded latex foam rubber	Outer cover, outer pillow			
The Big One Microfiber (2-pack; Kohl's)	62	$7	⌃	⌃	⌄	–	⇈	Fiber batting	Yes			
Himoon Bed Pillows	62	$25	⌃	–	–	–	⇈	Polyester	No			
Allied Home RDS White Goose Down (Costco)	61	$103	⇈	–	⇊	⇈	⇈	Down	Yes			●
Mainstays (Walmart) Huge (2-pack)	59	$16	⌃	⇈	⇊	–	⇈	Polyester fiber	Yes			●
My Pillow Classic	58	$40	⇈	⌃	⌄	⌄	⇈	Shredded polyurethane foam	Yes			●
Martha Stewart Collection Allergy Wise Dobby Stripe Medium/Firm Standard (Macy's)	56	$50	⌃	–	⇊	⌃	⇈	Polyester fiberfill	Yes			
Martha Stewart 400 Thread Count White Down	56	$40	⌃	–	⇊	⇈	⌃	Down	Dry-clean only			
Purple Harmony	56	$200	⇈	–	⇊	⌃	⇈	Purple GelFlex Grid and latex	Cover only			●

WORSE ⇊ ⌄ – ⌃ ⇈ BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features				
			Side support	Back support	Resilience	Use and preference	Breathability	Type	Washable	Memory foam	Cooling properties	Retains warmth
PILLOWS *Continued*												
Brooklinen Marlow	56	$65	▲	●	▼▼	▲	▲▲	Shredded foam pieces and fiber batting	Spot-clean only	●		
Farm to Home Organic Cotton Poly Around White Goose Down (2-pack)	55	$70	▲▲	●	▼▼	▲	▲▲	Feather and down	Dry-clean only			
Hotel Collection European White Goose Down Medium Density Standard Pillow (Macy's)	55	$340	▲	●	▼▼	▲	▲▲	Down	Yes			
Amazon Basics Down Alternative PL0047	55	$32	▲▲	▲	▼▼	●	▲	Polyester fiber	Cover only			●
Member's Mark (Sam's Club) Hotel Premier Collection	54	$17	▲▲	●	▼▼	▲	▲▲	Polyester fill	Yes			●
Sealy Elite Cool Touch Advanced Cooling	53	$40	▲▲	●	▼▼	▲	▲	Polyester fiber	Yes			
Utopia Bedding UB1535	53	$30	▲	●	▼▼	▲	▲▲	Polyester fiber	No			

HOW WE TEST: **Overall Score** is based on performance in all our tests. **Side support** and **back support** are measures of how well the pillow supports sleepers who lie in those positions, and the angle at which their head is positioned. **Resilience** notes how the pillow's firmness, height, and support change with use. **Breathability** analyzes how well the pillow dissipates moisture from a contact area. **Use and preference** assesses user interaction with the product, including test panelists' judgments, head contact, and pressure distribution.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR PILLOW

1

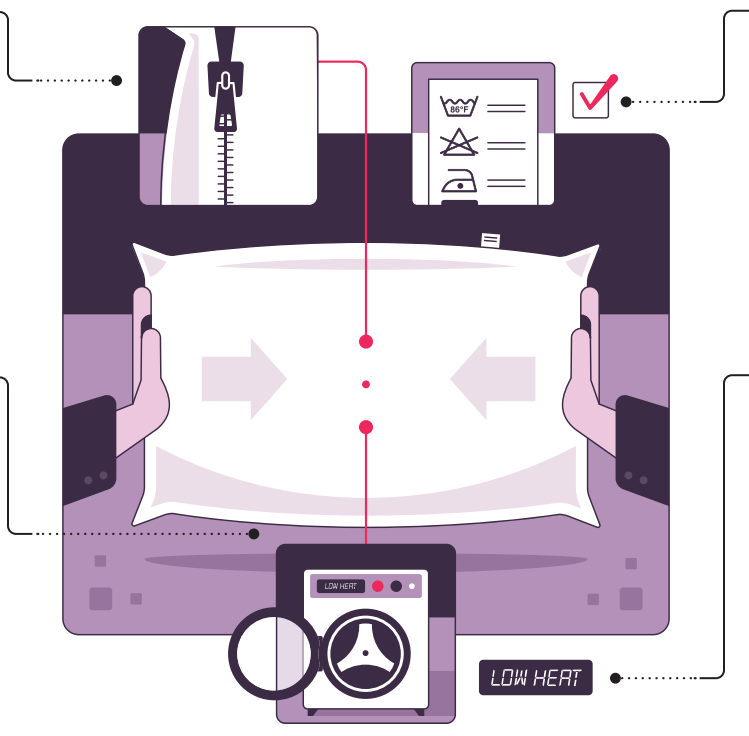
Use a Pillow Protector

These zip over your pillow, protecting it from dirt and damage. Look for one that's certified by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, which means it will keep dust mites at bay.

2

Fluff Daily, Air Monthly

Fluffing restores a pillow's shape and removes dust. Each month, hang it outdoors for a few hours, ideally on a bright, breezy day. If that's not possible, or your pillow is the type that doesn't fluff (foam, for example), run it through the dryer on the no-heat or "air fluff" cycle.



3

Wash at Least Twice a Year

First, check the care label. For machine-washable pillows, use the gentle cycle and a little detergent. For slab-style foam pillows, vacuum the surface and spot-clean with a damp cloth and mild detergent, says CR's laundry pro, Rich Handel.

4

Dry It Well

Make sure your pillow is completely dry or you risk it getting mildew. Dry for at least an hour on low heat (without heat for down or feather pillows). Add a few dry towels to speed things up and two clean tennis balls or dryer balls to keep the filling from clumping. Lay foam pillows flat to dry or hang outside.

ILLUSTRATION BY GUILHERME HENRIQUE

7 ANTI-AGING SUP

We all want to sleep better, maintain strong muscles and bones, and keep our hearts healthy. Here are some supplements that might help, and the ones that probably won't.

by Ashley Abramson
Photographs by Gregory Reid

MELATONIN TO HELP YOU SLEEP and Prevagen to keep you sharp. Fish oil for your heart and probiotics for your gut. In ads and on social media, we're always hearing about supplements that might help us think more clearly, have more energy, and just generally feel better as we age. But are any of them actually worth taking?

While the claims for many supplements go far beyond what's been proved, some may indeed help you fend off illness, stay strong, and even look good. That's partly because some people have restrictive diets that make it hard to get enough of certain nutrients from food or have conditions that prevent them from absorbing enough of key nutrients. And just getting older

PLEMENTS TO TRY

can trigger the need for supplements.

For one thing, we become less efficient at absorbing some nutrients as we age, says Joel Mason, MD, leader of the vitamins and carcinogenesis team at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston. Plus, some of us eat less, just as our bodies need more of certain vitamins and minerals. For example, our ability to generate new bone slows with age, so if you didn't consume enough dairy when younger or you don't eat a lot of it now, you might need extra calcium and vitamin D to protect your bones.

It's best to get nutrients from food–it contains a mix of vitamins, minerals, fiber, protein, and more that no supplement can match, says JoAnn E. Manson, MD, chief of preventive medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. And supplements can pose risks, including potential interactions with medications. So talk with your doctor before taking a new supplement.

Still, even people who eat right can occasionally need something extra. Here are seven supplements that can help some people strengthen their bones, improve their sleep, protect their heart, and more. We also offer advice on the right dosages, plus tips on vetting supplements. Key point: Choose products, such as those highlighted on the following pages, that have been verified to be free of contaminants and to contain what their labels claim. Finally, we identify three supplements that you probably shouldn't bother taking.

7 SUPPLEMENTS TO CONSIDER

1 | Calcium

Strong Bone Builder

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT The most abundant mineral in the body, calcium is primarily stored in your bones. If you don't get enough in your diet, your body will start taking it from your bones, resulting in a heightened risk of osteoporosis. Calcium also helps your muscles to move effectively, your blood vessels to send blood throughout your body, and your nerves to send messages to control important bodily functions, such as the release of hormones.

WHO SHOULD TAKE IT Starting at age 65, women should be screened for osteoporosis. If it turns out you have weak or brittle bones, your doctor will likely prescribe medication and recommend a calcium supplement. You might also want a supplement if you have early signs of osteoporosis, especially if you don't consume many dairy products because you're lactose-intolerant, you're a vegan, or you just don't like dairy. In fact, any postmenopausal woman who doesn't regularly consume dairy products should consider supplemental calcium. Most other women, and most men of any age, don't need calcium from pills. Too much increases the risk of kidney stones and possibly heart disease.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED? Everyone ages 19 to 50 and men between 51 and 70 need 1,000 mg of daily calcium. Women between 51 and 70 and everyone older than 71 need 1,200 mg. For context, there are about 325 mg of calcium in a cup of skim milk, 173 mg in a single-serve container of nonfat Greek yogurt, and 245 mg in a cup of cooked spinach. When choosing a calcium supplement, consider how much calcium you get from food–then look for one that gets you up to the amount recommended for your age and gender. Supplements with calcium carbonate tend to cost a little less, but those with calcium citrate are a good choice if you take medications to decrease stomach acid, like heartburn drugs.

CALCIUM PICKS

Nature Made 500 mg Calcium With D3
$11.99/130 ct.

Kirkland Signature (Costco) 600 mg Calcium With D3
$13.99/500 ct.

COLLAGEN PICKS

Walgreens Ultra Collagen + Vitamin C
$19.99/90 ct.

Garden of Life Grass Fed Collagen Peptides
$46.99/19.75 oz.

2 | Collagen

For Skin and Joint Health

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT Collagen is a protein that helps form connective tissue, including skin, bones, cartilage, muscles, ligaments, and tendons. The body makes less of it with age, leading to sagging skin and osteoarthritis, so maintaining adequate levels is important. Collagen is abundant in red meat. And eggs, dairy, and poultry may help the body produce its own collagen because the protein in these foods can be broken down into the amino acids your body needs to make collagen.

WHO SHOULD TAKE IT While most Americans consume more than enough protein, shortfalls become more common with age as your protein needs increase to counteract muscle loss. In fact, research suggests that close to half of older adults get less protein than they need.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED? The average adult needs 0.36 gram of protein per pound of body weight, or 54 grams for a 150-pound person. For context, you get to about 50 grams when you add up 3 ounces of chicken breast, 5.5 ounces of Greek yogurt, and a half-cup of white beans. But older adults need

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (SUPPLEMENTS); PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (BOTTLES)

about 50 percent more, or about 75 grams a day for a 150-pound person. If you have trouble getting that much from your diet and have arthritis or are worried about wrinkles or sagging skin, a collagen supplement is worth considering.

Pay attention to the type of collagen in your supplement. Type I collagen is used for skin health, while type II is the main constituent of cartilage, so it's used for joints; type III is found in the skin and internal organs. A 2018 study of 64 women found that taking 1,000 mg of type I collagen improved wrinkles and skin elasticity. And 40 mg of type II collagen helped reduce symptoms of osteoarthritis, in a 2016 study of 191 middle-aged people.

3 | Fish Oil

For Your Brain and Heart

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT Fish oil contains omega-3 fatty acids called EPA and DHA, which your body needs to form cell membranes throughout your body–especially in your eyes and brain. They can also reduce triglycerides, a type of fat in the blood linked to heart disease.

FISH OIL PICKS

Pure Alaska Omega Wild Alaskan Salmon Oil 1,000 mg Softgels
$25.82/180 ct.

Nordic Naturals Algae Omega 715 mg Soft Gels
$28.99/60 ct.

Nature Made Fish Oil 1,000 mg Softgels
$14.89/90 ct.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GORAN FACTORY

Can You Take Too Many Vitamins?

INTENTIONALLY OR ACCIDENTALLY taking doses of vitamins that are higher than the tolerable upper intake level can cause uncomfortable and even dangerous side effects.

For example, high doses of magnesium can cause diarrhea and gastric cramping, and large amounts of a nutrient called choline can result in a fishy body odor. Excessive calcium can impair kidney function, and toxic amounts of vitamin D can increase the risk of heart arrhythmias.

The risk of adverse effects is higher with what's called megadosing, which involves taking much more than the recommended amount. While megadose amounts aren't officially established, "usually it's a dose much higher than people consume in foods," says Fang Fang Zhang, MD, chair of the division of nutrition epidemiology and data science at Tufts University in Boston. These doses (often listed as 500 percent or 1,000 percent of the Daily Value) can sometimes be found in widely available supplements.

It's often assumed that water-soluble vitamins, which you excrete, don't pose the toxicity risk of fat-soluble vitamins, which your body absorbs. But even some water-soluble vitamins can be dangerous in excessive amounts, especially when taken for an extended period. "When taking B6 in excess of 200 mg a day for an extended period of time, it can cause degeneration of the nerves and neuropathy," says Joel Mason, MD, at Tufts University.

WHO SHOULD TAKE IT People who don't eat at least 1.5 servings of fish per week could consider a fish oil supplement containing EPA and DHA, especially if they are at higher risk of cardiovascular disease because of high blood pressure, obesity, or a family history of heart disease, Manson says. (A serving of fish is 2 to 3 ounces, about the size of a deck of cards.) That could lower the risk of heart disease and help prevent dementia or Alzheimer's disease, research suggests. Anyone who has survived a heart attack or has been diagnosed with heart failure may also benefit, according to the American Heart Association.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED? The research on supplements reducing the risk of heart disease or Alzheimer's disease generally used a gram of EPA and DHA a day. If you have a history of heart attack or stroke or are at a very high risk for them, your doctor may suggest a prescription omega-3 pill, which could come in a higher dose and be covered by insurance, Manson says. For people who don't eat fish, Matthew Badgett, MD, a physician at the Cleveland Clinic in North Ridgeville, Ohio, recommends a plant-derived algae oil supplement due to its similar omega-3 content. Taking either form with meals, he says, can help absorption.

MAGNESIUM PICKS

Nature Made Magnesium Citrate 250 mg Softgels
$14.19/60 ct.

Kirkland Signature (Costco) Magnesium Citrate 250 mg Softgels
$22.99/270 ct.

Thorne Magnesium Bisglycinate Powder
$48/6.5 oz.

4 | Magnesium

Healthy Muscles and More

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT Your body uses this mineral to regulate blood pressure and blood sugar, make proteins, and ensure healthy muscle and nerve function. Low levels of magnesium may contribute to migraine headaches and muscle cramps. The mineral is naturally found in legumes, nuts, seeds (especially pumpkin), whole grains (especially quinoa), and leafy greens, along with fortified foods including cereal, milk, and yogurt.

WHO SHOULD TAKE IT Badgett most often suggests magnesium supplements for people who have constipation, insomnia, or chronic migraines. But others might benefit because nearly half of Americans don't get enough from food. Men older than 70 are especially likely to be deficient, as are people with gastrointestinal diseases and type 2 diabetes.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED? Men need 400 to 420 mg of magnesium a day, while women need 310 to 320 mg. (Two tablespoons of peanut butter has 54 mg; a cup of cooked quinoa has

These Rx Drugs and Supplements Don't Mix

YOU'VE OFTEN been told to tell your doctor about the supplements you're taking, and for good reason. Some vitamins, herbs, and other supplements can interfere with the effectiveness of medications. Others can dangerously increase the amount of a drug in your system.

"Remember, supplements are no different than prescriptions in their ability to interact with one another or medications," says Pieter Cohen, MD, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School in Boston and an internist at Cambridge Health Alliance. "It's important that whatever you decide to take, you let your prescribing doctor know to be sure there aren't any interactions or other reasons not to take it."

Statins

The herb St. John's wort, often used to help with depression, can decrease blood levels of statins, which are taken for high cholesterol levels. If you take this herb with certain statins, it may actually increase your cholesterol.

PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

118 mg.) Research has found that forms of magnesium that dissolve in liquid may be more effectively absorbed in the body. So a magnesium powder dissolved in a drink, rather than tablets, might be your best bet.

There are different types of magnesium: If you experience side effects—such as stomach cramps and diarrhea—with one type, try another. Magnesium oxide tends to be the least expensive but may be more likely to cause gastric side effects. Magnesium citrate and magnesium bisglycinate are thought to be more easily absorbed.

5 | Melatonin

For Better Sleep

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone that helps regulate your circadian rhythm, the body's internal clock that tells you when it's time to go to bed at night or wake up in the morning. Your body releases melatonin as you approach bedtime to make you sleepy, especially if you manage to get plenty of daylight in the morning and avoid too much light at night. When you wake up, your levels of melatonin dip.

MELATONIN PICKS

Nature Made Melatonin Gummies 2.5 mg $16.89/80 ct.

Amazon Elements Melatonin Gummies 10 mg $7.99/60 ct.

Natrol Fast Dissolve Melatonin 5 mg $13.98/150 ct.

WHO SHOULD TAKE IT There are certain serious, uncommon sleep disorders in adults and children that are treated with melatonin. Beyond that, the supplement is best for episodic (rather than chronic) sleep problems, including periodic insomnia and jet lag. Many people take melatonin routinely before bed, but the evidence isn't strong enough to suggest it helps for insomnia that lasts longer than a month. In those cases, talk to your doctor or a sleep specialist.

Though taking melatonin is generally thought to be safe and doesn't usually cause dependence, its long-term effects are not fully known, especially in children. And it's not a magic fix: According to one 2013 analysis, people with insomnia fall asleep an average of 7 minutes faster when they take melatonin.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED? In the short term, melatonin can be taken as needed before bed, says Deirdre Conroy, PhD, clinical director of the behavioral sleep medicine program at the University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor. To match natural levels, you'd ideally

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 31]

Metformin

If you take metformin to treat diabetes, avoid St. John's wort, which may cause a buildup of metformin in your body that may interfere with your blood glucose levels.

Antibiotics

Calcium, magnesium, and zinc can interfere with the absorption of some antibiotics, particularly tetracycline. So it's recommended that you take that antibiotic several hours before or after you take any of those supplements. Check with your prescriber for specific advice.

Antidepressants

It may not be safe to take St. John's wort with antidepressants, because supplements containing the herb can result in dangerously high levels of serotonin in your body. The same is true for serotonin-boosting supplements such as 5-HTP and SAM-e.

Blood thinners

It can be dangerous to take vitamins A, E, or K, which thin the blood, if you're already taking the blood thinner warfarin. Omega-3 fatty acids in higher-than-recommended doses (think 10 mg a day) can also be risky with blood thinners, says Matthew Badgett, MD, of the Cleveland Clinic. Vitamin C supplements may cause the opposite problem, making blood thinners less effective and increasing the risk of blood clots.

Thyroid medications

The thyroid medication Synthroid, or levothyroxine, doesn't get absorbed properly if you take it with iron, magnesium, zinc, or other mineral supplements. Take your thyroid medication as directed by your healthcare provider, which typically means without another medication or supplement.

Do You Really Need a Multivitamin?

MULTIVITAMINS ARE FAR AND AWAY the most popular supplement in the U.S., but there is a dizzying array of choices. In reality, the only people who clearly need a multivitamin are those with "a problem absorbing food or on an extremely restricted diet," says Pieter Cohen, MD, of Harvard Medical School.

But it's reasonable for some people—especially anyone with concerns about whether they're eating enough healthy foods—to consider taking a multi as a sort of insurance policy, says JoAnn E. Manson, MD, of Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

You can also take a multivitamin rather than individual supplements if you have more than one special dietary need—for example, if you're a vegetarian, your healthcare provider may recommend taking a supplement that contains iron, vitamin B12, and other nutrients commonly found in animal products.

If you decide to try a multivitamin, be sure you find one that's certified by an independent third party such as U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP), NSF International, or UL (see "How We Picked Products," below), and keep these tips in mind.

Know your dosages

Read the ingredients label to make sure the nutrients meet the recommended amounts and don't exceed upper limits. Search for "DRI calculator" online to find a government calculator that can help you find the right amounts of various vitamins and minerals for someone your age, gender, and size.

PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (SUPPLEMENTS). PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (BOTTLES)

HOW WE PICKED PRODUCTS: The supplements highlighted in this article were not tested by CR but contain a dosage as close as possible to what's recommended and in most cases a seal from an independent testing group.

Seals are key because the Food and Drug Administration doesn't regulate supplements as it does drugs. So a seal "can help ensure you're getting a quality product that contains the ingredients and doses listed on the label [and] is free from harmful contaminants," says Stefan M. Pasiakos, PhD, director of the National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements.

Reputable seals include UL, NSF International, and U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP). Go to quality-supplements.org to look up USP Verified supplements. The National Institutes of Health Dietary Supplement Label Database (dsld.od.nih.gov) can help compare products.

For our picks, we prioritize the USP seal, because the USP also developed the standards that govern prescription and

Be wary of 'whole-food' claims

Some vitamins, often labeled "whole-food derived," claim to include nutrients derived from food (rather than synthesized in a lab). But these ingredients still must be heavily processed to become supplements. And the source is not likely to make a difference in effectiveness, says Joel Mason, MD, of Tufts University. Instead, you may end up paying more for a supplement that's no better than a cheaper one.

Check the size of the pill

Multivitamins are often large, which can make swallowing them difficult for some people. Food and Drug Administration guidance says that generic medications meant to be swallowed should not exceed 17 mm long, but some multivitamins are longer than 20 mm and as wide as 10 mm. So check the size before you buy, if you can.

Consider age-specific vitamins

A general multivitamin usually contains ample nutrients to meet most people's needs. But Manson says it's reasonable to choose a multi labeled as "for women" or "for older people." These sometimes contain additional nutrients, such as extra iron for women or vitamin D or B12 for older people.

over-the-counter drugs. In addition, USP buys products off the shelves for periodic spot checks. Many (though not all) Nature Made and Kirkland (Costco) vitamins are USP Verified.

You could also consider buying your supplements from CVS, because the retailer says it requires third-party testing for all the vitamins and supplements that it sells.

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29]

start with a supplement containing a dose between 0.2 and 0.5 mg; practically, however, doses starting at 1 mg are more widely available. In the U.K., where melatonin is available only by prescription, the country's health service recommends 3 mg as a treatment for jet lag. You should not exceed 10 mg. Choosing a product with a third-party seal is especially important with this supplement; a 2023 study found inconsistent melatonin levels in some melatonin gummies.

6 | Vitamin B12

Important for Nerve Health

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT Vitamin B12, one of eight B vitamins, plays a key role in red blood cell formation and nervous system function. Healthy levels of B12 can prevent vitamin deficiency anemia, which can lead to weakness and fatigue, along with nerve damage, memory problems, depression, and heart palpitations. The vitamin is found in animal products, such as fish, meat, poultry, and milk. Plant foods, unless they're fortified, don't contain vitamin B12.

WHO SHOULD TAKE IT People who may need a B12 supplement include older adults, whose lower gastric acid levels make it harder to absorb the nutrient, says Stefan M. Pasiakos, PhD, director of the National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements. Vegetarians or vegans can also be prone to low B12 levels. If you have a medical condition affecting your GI tract, such as inflammatory bowel disease or celiac disease, or if you take a medication that interferes with absorption, such as metformin (for diabetes) or a proton pump inhibitor (for heartburn), you may also need to supplement, Manson says. If you present with symptoms of vitamin B12 deficiency, your doctor may test your levels.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED? Not a lot: The recommended amount for adults is 2.4 micrograms (mcg). Typically, Manson says, the amount in a multivitamin is more than enough (and may help you save money on an individual supplement).

VITAMIN B12 PICKS

Walgreens Vitamin B12 1,000 mcg
$19.99/300 ct.

Wegmans Organic Vitamin B12 500 mcg Gummies
$9.99/60 ct.

Nature Made Vitamin B12 500 mcg
$18.39/200 ct.

7 | Vitamin D

Bone, Brain, and Immunity Booster

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium, which is key for maintaining bone density. Your body also needs it for healthy neuromuscular and immune function. Getting enough may support brain function and decrease the risk of depression. Low vitamin D has also been linked to insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes. Vitamin D is in fortified milk and breakfast cereals, fatty fish, and egg yolks. Your body can also make vitamin D when you are exposed to the sun, though this process becomes less efficient with age. Nearly a fifth of middle-aged and older adults in the U.S. are vitamin D deficient.

WHO SHOULD TAKE IT Adults over 75 and those younger than 75 with prediabetes might benefit from supplemental vitamin D, according to the Endocrine Society. Although screening for low vitamin D isn't recommended for everyone else, it may be a good idea if you have osteoporosis, other bone problems, or little sun exposure, or if you're concerned you might have very low vitamin D intake in your diet, Manson says. While some lab tests have suggested wearing sunscreen could interfere with vitamin D production, there's little evidence of this in the real world.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED? Adults up to 70 need 600 international units (15 mcg) of vitamin D each day, and those 71 and older need 800 IU (20 mcg). To prevent toxicity, don't exceed the adult upper daily limit of 4,000 IU (100 mcg). Talk to your doctor if you have obesity. Vitamin D is fat soluble, so you may require a higher dosage, says Michael F. Holick, MD, a vitamin D researcher and professor of endocrinology, diabetes, nutrition, and weight management at Boston University School of Medicine. Some D supplements include vitamin K2, which is thought to help with calcium and vitamin D absorption. Holick says this isn't necessary unless you're deficient in vitamin K. (If you eat a healthy diet full of green, leafy veggies, you generate plenty of K in your gut.) Most calcium supplements come with vitamin D, which helps your body absorb the bone-building mineral, so check your supplements to make sure you don't end up taking too much.

VITAMIN D PICKS

Nature's Bounty Vitamin D3 125 mcg
$14.80/150 ct.

Member's Mark (Sam's Club) Vitamin D3 50 mcg Softgels
$6.98/400 ct.

3 SUPPLEMENTS TO SKIP

While not everyone needs to take the seven supplements recommended in this article, they can help many of us. The same is not true of these three popular pills. There is either little evidence that they are helpful or very limited situations in which they might be of use.

1 | Vitamin C

Vitamin C deficiency is unusual in the U.S.; only about 7 percent of Americans have it. For the other 93 percent of us, a vitamin C supplement is simply not worth the money. Research has found that it doesn't reduce the risk of getting the common cold in people who aren't deficient, despite its common use for that.

For the few people who don't get enough vitamin C in their diet–it's plentiful in citrus fruits, peppers, broccoli, potatoes, and more–a regular supplement may shorten the duration and severity of a cold, though this effect is slight. Smokers also may need supplemental vitamin C.

A serious vitamin C deficiency is easy to spot: People often feel so sick with fatigue, aches, and pains that they go to a doctor for testing, says Pieter Cohen, MD, of Harvard Medical School.

PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (SUPPLEMENTS). PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (BOTTLES)

2 | Probiotics

There's little research to suggest that taking a probiotic supplement is beneficial for the general population, even though it sounds promising in theory. Diverse gut bacteria can indeed help promote health in the GI tract and beyond. But JoAnn E. Manson, MD, of Brigham and Women's Hospital, says there's not yet enough evidence about the effects of these supplements to make a broad recommendation.

Doctors may recommend taking probiotics to help with very specific health situations, such as ulcerative colitis or a serious bacterial infection known as Clostridioides difficile (C. diff). And probiotic supplements that contain live bacteria are being studied for many conditions, including antibiotic-associated diarrhea, eczema, inflammatory bowel disease, and high cholesterol. But in most of these cases, you'd need a particular amount and strain to benefit. "I wouldn't be using whatever you find on a store shelf," Cohen says.

3 | Glucosamine and Chondroitin

Commonly taken together to treat joint pain due to osteoarthritis, glucosamine and chondroitin are key components of cartilage, which arthritis wears down. A large body of research has found conflicting conclusions about whether these supplements are actually effective.

They are known to have a strong placebo effect, so many people who take them experience some relief. But the same is true of people in osteoarthritis studies who are given placebo pills, so you may want to save your money. Manson says she doesn't routinely recommend these supplements to patients with arthritis. Instead, consider regular exercise, including gentle activities like tai chi or swimming if the pain is severe, losing excess weight, and occasional use of OTC pain relievers.

What About Prevagen?

YOU'VE PROBABLY seen ads for Prevagen, a supplement with a protein derived from jellyfish, claiming it will improve age-related memory loss. Forty-three percent of Americans have heard of it, according to a May 2024 CR nationally representative survey of 2,022 U.S. adults. But the Federal Trade Commission and the state of New York have taken actions against the company, saying research shows the company's product simply does not work. "I tell my patients not to take Prevagen," says Matthew Badgett, MD, of the Cleveland Clinic. To stay sharp, focus instead on the same things that keep your body healthy, like managing diabetes and other diseases, and prioritizing a nutritious diet, regular exercise, and sleep.

Going the Distance
Reliable appliances, like this GE Profile electric smoothtop range, LG top-freezer fridge (left), and Bosch dishwasher (right), offer years of service.

THESE ARE THE APPLIANCES THAT LAST

IT'S NOT YOUR IMAGINATION: Large appliances don't work as long as they used to. "If you bought an appliance 30 years ago, it might still be functioning today," says Alex Minkin, associate director of appliance testing at Consumer Reports. But these days, you can expect appliances to last only 10 to 15 years, he says, at least partly because of changes in the way they're designed and manufactured.

Have an older appliance on the fritz? We'll help you determine whether or not it's worth fixing. We'll also help you narrow down your choices when shopping for a new one. And we'll identify the types of refrigerators, ranges, and so on that our surveys show stand the test of time. Plus, we'll recommend specific appliance models that are highly reliable and shine in CR performance tests.

BY MOLLY BRADLEY, KEITH FLAMER, PAUL HOPE, AND DANIEL WROCLAWSKI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARCO MONTIEL

The Life Span of ...

Refrigerators

For the longest-lasting refrigerator, your best bet is one with either a top or bottom freezer. CR member surveys show that these are the least likely to have problems. If you really want a French-door or side-by-side style, skip models with an icemaker or a water/ice dispenser. Up to 15 percent of owners of fridges with that feature had problems with it. Compressors, which are expensive to repair, are much less likely to break, though those in French-door fridges may be an exception.

LIFE EXPECTANCY 11.1 to 14 years

WHAT BREAKS

Icemakers, water dispensers

Should You Repair or Replace It? With median repair costs about $120 to $330, it often makes sense to repair a refrigerator, even one that's 10 years old. The exceptions are budget top-freezers and side-by-sides, because the cost of a new one—$500 to $600 for a top-freezer, for example—isn't a lot more than what a repair might be. On the other hand, a malfunctioning 9-year-old French-door fridge that would cost $1,200 to replace is probably worth trying to repair in most instances.

Top Picks From Reliable Brands

Top-Freezer

Samsung RT16A6195SR $650 — 79 OVERALL SCORE

LG LTCS20030S $800 — 78 OVERALL SCORE

Whirlpool WRT112CZJZ $590 — 76 OVERALL SCORE

Bottom-Freezer

LG LBNC15231V $1,300 — 79 OVERALL SCORE

Fisher & Paykel ActiveSmart RF170WDLX5 $2,500 — 67 OVERALL SCORE

Side-by-Side

GE GSE23GGPWW $1,880 — 72 OVERALL SCORE

GE GSS25GYPFS $1,100 — 71 OVERALL SCORE

French-Door

GE GYE22GYNFS $2,050 — 80 OVERALL SCORE

Bosch B36FD50SNS $2,700 — 74 OVERALL SCORE

Whirlpool WRF555SDHV $1,900 — 72 OVERALL SCORE

Built-In

Thermador T36IT905NP $10,500 — 81 OVERALL SCORE

Bosch Benchmark B30IB905SP $8,000 — 73 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS

Note: The appliance life expectancies are from a 2019 survey by the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers.

WORSE — BETTER

CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

The Life Span of ...

Ranges

The problems you might encounter over the years depend on your style of range. For those with gas-fueled appliances, trouble with the ignition is the most common, and it's more likely with pro-style models than with other types of gas ranges. The cooktops of electric smoothtop ranges are more likely to need repair due to chips or scratches.

LIFE EXPECTANCY 11.6 to 14.2 years

WHAT BREAKS

Cooking surfaces, gas ignitions, heating elements, control panels

Top Picks From Reliable Brands

Gas

LG LTGL6937F
$2,600
79 OVERALL SCORE

GE JGB735SPSS
$850
75 OVERALL SCORE

Electric Smoothtop

Frigidaire Gallery GCFE3060BF
$1,100
89 OVERALL SCORE

GE Profile PSS93YPFS
$1,800
88 OVERALL SCORE

Electric Induction

Frigidaire Gallery GCFI3060BF
$1,400
92 OVERALL SCORE

LG LSIL6336FE
$2,500
88 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD AND FOLLOWING SPREAD: MANUFACTURERS

Should You Repair or Replace It?

Smaller problems, like a broken knob, can be fixed for as little as $10 by buying parts at Amazon. But even when you need to call in a pro for a bigger repair, it may be money well spent. According to CR member surveys, any type of range is worth repairing if you've owned it for 10 years or less. The median repair cost is $165; for pro-style repairs, it's $284. If you're on the fence about repairing or replacing your range, there's an incentive to buy a new one: The Inflation Reduction Act gives consumers until 2032 to take advantage of state-level rebates for ranges–typically up to $840 for the purchase of a new electric range. To see rebates for your area, go to energystar.gov/rebate-finder.

The Life Span of ...

Dishwashers

How long a dishwasher lasts depends mainly on the reliability of the brand. In CR member surveys, Bosch dishwashers were far less likely than other brands to have water leakage problems or motor malfunctions. Generally, models with a stainless steel tub will hold up better over the years; plastic can stain and crack.

LIFE EXPECTANCY 12 years

WHAT BREAKS

Control panels, dish racks, WiFi-enabled features, motor, soap dispensers

Should You Repair or Replace It?

Dishwashers have a good track record in our CR member surveys; most people reported at least 10 problem-free years with their machine. When dishwashers do have a problem, the median cost of a repair is $138. A dishwasher that you bought for less than $700 is worth repairing through its fourth year, according to our data; for those priced from $700 to $999, through the fifth year. For a high-end dishwasher that could cost you $1,000 or more, it's worth repairing through the sixth year of ownership. One upside to replacing a dishwasher? Increased water and energy efficiency. New models use as little as 3 gallons to wash a load of dishes, and many models use no more than 13 cents' worth of electricity per cycle.

Top Picks From Reliable Brands

Bosch 500 Series SHP65CM5N
$1,150
79 OVERALL SCORE

Bosch 800 Series SHX78CM5N
$1,350
79 OVERALL SCORE

Miele G5056SCVISF
$1,500
65 OVERALL SCORE

The Life Span of ...

Washing Machines

You can count on a washer to last about a decade or longer. But front-loaders are more prone to developing mildew and mold, and top-loaders are more likely to tangle up your clothes. Among laundry appliances, LG earns top marks for reliability most frequently.

LIFE EXPECTANCY 9.1 to 11.2 years

WHAT BREAKS
Drum, controls, pump

Should You Repair or Replace It?
Washers are workhorses that rarely break down. Consider repairing yours–regardless of what it cost when new–unless it's reaching the end of its expected life. Our 2023 member survey found that the median out-of-pocket washer repair cost ranged from $120 to $230, depending on the type of washer and what the problem was.

Top Picks From Reliable Brands

Top-Loader

LG WT7150CW $950
85 OVERALL SCORE

LG WT7400CV $1,150
80 OVERALL SCORE

Speed Queen TC5003WN $1,330
64 OVERALL SCORE

Front-Loader

LG WM8900HBA $1,500
87 OVERALL SCORE

Electrolux ELFW7637AT $1,350
81 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung FlexWash WV60A9900AV $1,800
81 OVERALL SCORE

ARE 'SMART' APPLIANCES EASIER TO FIX?

When something goes wrong, "smart" appliances—those with internet connectivity—can often be repaired faster and with fewer service calls.

That's because smart appliances, such as those made by GE and Kenmore, may have remote diagnostic capabilities that allow the manufacturer's repair service

The Life Span of ...

Dryers

Clothes dryers usually have few problems. There's evidence from CR members: 92 percent of dryers that they purchased in 2013 or after are still in use. But the most common complaint was about clothes not being fully dried; 12 percent of those surveyed said this was the case with their machine.

LIFE EXPECTANCY 13.4 years

WHAT BREAKS
Drum, vent, heating element

Should You Repair or Replace It?
Gas dryer repairs range from $133 to $190, while electric dryer repairs range from $125 to $192. If you paid less than $900 for an electric dryer, it makes sense to repair it through year five. If it cost over $900 when new, that time frame increases to eight years. The median cost of replacing a full-sized electric dryer ranges from $571 on the low end to $1,063 on the high end.

Top Picks From Reliable Brands

Gas

LG DLGX5501W
$1,300
85 OVERALL SCORE

Speed Queen DF7004WG
$2,400
74 OVERALL SCORE

Maytag MGD6500MBK
$1,250
66 OVERALL SCORE

Electric

LG DLEX7900BE
$1,350
87 OVERALL SCORE

Amana NED5800HW
$950
75 OVERALL SCORE

Whirlpool WED9620HC
$1,500
74 OVERALL SCORE

to connect to the appliance over the internet to figure out what's wrong. If they see that a particular part needs to be replaced, for example, they can order it and make sure the service technician has it on hand the first time they visit.

Even if you're not comfortable connecting your smart appliance to the internet, it can store diagnostic and other data that a manufacturer's service technicians can access via a port when they come to your home, helping them diagnose the problem faster.

Independent repair technicians don't have remote diagnostic capabilities, but they might be able to access the data stored in your appliance. For example, GE sells diagnostic tools to both authorized and nonauthorized third-party repair shops. When choosing an independent shop, ask if it has access to these tools. This won't cut down on repeat visits, but it can help the technician figure out what's gone awry more quickly.

Oui by Yoplait Whole Milk French Style Fruit on the Bottom, Strawberry

Bellwether Farms A2 Organic Whole Milk, Strawberry

Fage BestSelf Lactose Free Reduced Fat Greek, Strawberry

CR'S NEW GUIDE TO

Yogurt

Beyond traditional and Greek, there's skyr and kefir, yogurts made with cashew milk, oat milk, coconut milk, and more. Which are the healthiest—and taste great, too?

BY JANET LEE PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREGORY REID

Forager Project Dairy Free Cashewmilk Organic, Strawberry

✔ Norr Organic Non-Fat Skyr, Strawberry & Rhubarb

✔ Icelandic Provisions Low Fat Skyr, Strawberry & Lingonberry

✔ Harmless Harvest Organic Cultured Coconut, Strawberry

FEW FOODS ARE as healthy and versatile as yogurt. It's great for breakfast or dessert, as a snack, in smoothies, and even—in the case of plain yogurt—as a condiment (say, a topping for baked potatoes or a substitute for mayonnaise). But the yogurt aisle has become a complicated place to shop today with so many new kinds out there. Do you want Greek or Icelandic? Dairy or oat or almond? And is it better to go with a nonfat or low-fat yogurt rather than a whole-milk version?

One thing is clear: Many yogurts are packed with protein, calcium, potassium, and, most important, live active cultures and probiotics. These healthy bacteria are what ferment the milk to turn it into yogurt and make it easier for the body to absorb protein and calcium. They have other benefits, too, such as supporting gastrointestinal health and helping to control blood pressure and cholesterol. These bacteria also may tamp down chronic inflammation, which causes cell damage and is thought to be at the root of many illnesses, including Alzheimer's disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer.

"Any type of plain yogurt with live active cultures is a good choice and offers these benefits, but many people prefer flavored yogurt," says Amy Keating, RD, a CR nutritionist. "That's where you have to choose carefully, because the ingredients and the nutritional content can vary considerably from brand to brand. Some have a lot of added sugars or other ingredients you may not want."

To help with that, we recently tested 32 strawberry yogurts—the

most popular flavor in the U.S.– and included dairy and plant-milk ones, Greek, Icelandic, French, and traditional styles, and yogurts with different fat levels. Keating rated each one for nutrition, and a panel of professional tasters rated them for taste. The good news is that we found 12 to recommend, and at least one of every yogurt type got top marks for taste, nutrition, or both.

In addition, this guide explains the differences among the various yogurt types and styles. We also tell you what to watch out for on labels so that you can make healthy choices no matter which flavors you enjoy.

Low-Fat, Nonfat and Whole-Milk

Which should you choose? The three types vary not just in fat levels but also in other nutrients, as well as in texture and flavor.

In general, whole-milk yogurt has a few more calories and is higher in fat and saturated fat than low-fat and nonfat yogurts. It's also lower in protein and calcium. For example, a cup of traditional whole-milk plain yogurt has about 8 grams of protein and 300 mg of calcium vs. about 11 grams of protein and 400 mg of calcium in a cup of traditional plain nonfat.

A majority of the fat in whole-milk yogurt is saturated, which experts caution against overconsuming. But some research suggests that dairy fat might not have the same artery-clogging effect as the saturated fat in red meat, processed meat, and some baked goods. While it still may be important to keep your overall saturated fat intake in check, there's little difference in the way nonfat, low-fat, or whole-milk yogurts affect your risk of chronic diseases, says Mark Haub, PhD, a professor of food and health sciences at Kansas State University in Manhattan. So it's fine to choose the type you like best from the following.

→ **WHOLE-MILK** yogurt has a creamy, velvety texture because of the full-fat milk it's made from. It also has the most saturated fat (about 5 grams per cup for plain yogurt). In our tests, all of the whole-milk strawberry yogurts rated highly for taste. But some people might find whole-milk yogurt too rich for their liking.

→ **LOW-FAT** yogurt falls in between whole-milk and nonfat versions in terms of texture and nutrition. Plain low-fat yogurt will usually have about half the saturated fat of whole-milk yogurt. The amount of protein is about 30 percent higher, while calcium levels are about 35 percent higher.

→ **NONFAT** yogurt has a thinner texture and may be slightly watery, although Greek and Icelandic versions can still be pretty thick. Plain nonfat yogurt can taste more tart than whole-milk ones. Nonfat traditional has about 30 percent more protein and 40 percent more calcium than traditional whole-milk yogurt.

In our tests of 32 strawberry yogurts, we found 12 to recommend. And at least one of every yogurt type got top marks for taste, nutrition, or both.

Dairy Yogurt

→ **TRADITIONAL** yogurt was for many years the only type on the market in the U.S. Even today, if a yogurt label doesn't specify otherwise, this is probably what you're getting. Traditional or "unstrained" yogurt is creamy and has a looser texture than some other types. It comes in nonfat, low-fat, and whole-milk forms, and in general, the higher the fat content, the creamier the yogurt. It has about half the protein of Greek or Icelandic varieties but is the highest in calcium.

→ **GREEK** is noticeably thicker than traditional styles because it's strained to remove the liquid whey (a protein in milk). Whole-milk versions are quite dense, but even a nonfat Greek yogurt can be thick and firm. It also tends to have a tangier flavor than traditional yogurt, especially the plain varieties. The higher concentration of milk solids means that Greek yogurt has about twice the protein. But it also has more calories than a traditional yogurt with the same fat level. The biggest difference is between the

PHOTOS: ALL SPREADS: PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH. PHOTO, THIS SPREAD: ADOBE STOCK (SPOON)

whole-milk yogurts: Plain Greek has about 215 calories per cup, and plain traditional has about 150 calories. And Greek has less calcium. For instance, low-fat traditional plain yogurt has about 390 mg per cup while low-fat Greek has about 265 mg.

→ **ICELANDIC,** also known as skyr, ferments longer than other types and is strained several times. It's generally thicker than Greek yogurt and tangier tasting, too. Though it varies by brand, Icelandic yogurt tends to have slightly more protein than Greek yogurt but less calcium than traditional yogurt. Like traditional and Greek yogurt, it comes in nonfat, low-fat, and whole-milk forms.

→ **FRENCH** Most yogurts are produced in huge vats and then put into individual containers for sale. French yogurt is "pot set," which means it's made and sold in individual glass or clay jars. It's on the denser, creamier side for an unstrained yogurt because it's typically made with whole milk. French-style yogurt is similar to traditional whole-milk yogurt in calories, saturated fat, protein, and calcium. Plain French tends to taste less sweet than other styles.

Plant-Milk Yogurt

→ **ALMOND OR CASHEW MILK** Like dairy yogurt, these contain live active cultures and probiotics. They're also low in saturated fat. Protein in the ones in our tests ranged from 3 to 5 grams per container. The dairy yogurts we tested had 4 to 15 grams. Nut-milk yogurts that have more protein may contain isolated sources of protein such as soy protein. These may not be as good for you as the protein naturally in foods. Nut milks have little natural calcium, so you'll want to look for a yogurt that's fortified with the mineral. Even so, they're not necessarily brimming with calcium. Those in our tests had 2 to 10 percent of the daily value, while the dairy-milk yogurts had 10 to 20 percent.

→ **COCONUT MILK** has the creamiest texture of the plant-milk yogurts. It contains live active cultures but little calcium or protein (unless they're added) and often significantly more saturated fat than whole-milk dairy or other plant-milk yogurts. You may have heard that coconut's saturated fat doesn't increase cholesterol, but a 2020 analysis of 16 studies published in the journal Circulation found that coconut oil raised LDL ("bad") cholesterol by more than 10 points.

→ **OAT MILK** The slightly sweet taste of oat milk sometimes comes through in yogurts made from it. They contain good-for-you live cultures, and some have added protein. Like other plant-milk yogurts, they're low in calcium unless the mineral is added.

When Yogurt Goes Wrong

Selecting a healthy one isn't as easy as it should be, so you have to do a little label reading. Here's what to check for.

Added Sugars

For many people, added sugars can make yogurt taste less tart. "I'd rather see people eat a little more sugar and eat yogurt than say, 'Yuck, I don't like it, it's too sour,'" says Mark Haub, PhD, at Kansas State University.

Still, some flavored yogurts have a lot of added sugars. For example, Silk Almondmilk, Strawberry, has 12 grams (3 teaspoons) in a serving. La Yogurt Sabor Latino Low Fat Blended, Strawberry, has 18 grams (4.5 teaspoons)—and some of this brand's other flavors have more than that. The American Heart Association recommends women get no more than 25 grams (6 teaspoons) of added sugars and men no more than 36 grams (9 teaspoons) in an entire day.

CR suggests choosing a yogurt with no more than 8 grams of added sugars per serving. That's easy to do: Half of the yogurts that got excellent taste scores in our test had even less than that.

Too Sweet
This yogurt has 18 grams of added sugars and is at the bottom of our ratings.

Sugar Substitutes

You might think that "zero sugar" means no sweeteners. But that label claim and similar ones, such as "light" or "2 grams sugar," are more often code words for sugar substitutes, such as allulose, stevia, or sucralose. We didn't test any yogurts with nonsugar sweeteners because research suggests that they may pose health risks and may not actually help people lose weight.

Gums and Thickeners

Many yogurts contain some kind of thickener. Often it's pectin, a type of fiber in apples and citrus fruit. But it can also be guar gum, locust bean gum, or other gums. For some people, these can cause abdominal discomfort, so if you're sensitive to gums, check ingredients lists. You may want to skip yogurts that have them.

Frozen Yogurt

This is a form of yogurt, but not all of them offer live, active cultures and their health benefits. You have to check the ingredients list for terms like "live & active cultures" or "yogurt cultures," or specific bacteria to know.

Is it a better choice than ice cream? Maybe. For instance, while Ben & Jerry's Cherry Garcia frozen yogurt and its same-name ice cream have similar amounts of protein and calcium, the yogurt has fewer calories (230 vs. 340), saturated fat (3 grams vs. 13), and added sugars (22 grams vs. 31). But that's still a lot of calories and sugars.

What About Yogurt Drinks?

Drinkable yogurt is yogurt—it's simply been diluted a bit with water or produced in a way that gives it a lighter consistency than the spoonable stuff. Some have a very thin texture, while others are as thick as buttermilk or heavy cream. It depends on the style of yogurt used to make it (Greek is on the thicker side; traditional is thinner), the type of milk it contains (dairy or plant), and its fat content.

Kefir, another probiotic drink, is similar to drinkable yogurt but is fermented longer, so it tends to have a tarter taste. Rather than being made with just live bacterial cultures, as yogurts are, it's made with bacteria and yeast, and it may have a wider variety of probiotics than yogurt.

As with yogurts you eat with a spoon, drinkable yogurts and kefirs provide varying amounts of protein, calcium, and probiotics. CR suggests following our guidelines for added sugars, sugar substitutes, and thickeners. (See "When Yogurt Goes Wrong.") Two good vanilla picks we found are Siggi's Drinkable Nonfat Yogurt and Lifeway Lowfat Kefir, (shown above) both with 8 grams of added sugars per cup.

Ratings › **Spoon It Up** We tested both dairy and plant-milk yogurts and found that dairy fared best in nutrition and taste. When you're checking Overall Scores, note that more weight is given to nutrition.

Product	Overall Score	Test Results		Price	Nutrition Information (per container)							Tasting Notes
		Nutrition score	Sensory score	Per container/ container size (oz.)	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Added sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Calcium (% daily value)	
DAIRY YOGURT												
✓ **Norr Organic** Non-Fat Skyr, Strawberry & Rhubarb	86	⌃	⌃⌃	$2.90/4.4	90	0	0	10	5	12	10	A tasty nonfat yogurt that's creamier than most, it's slightly tart and sweet.
✓ **Icelandic Provisions** Low Fat Skyr, Strawberry & Lingonberry	82	⌃	⌃⌃	$2.30/5.3	130	2	1	14	6	15	15	This dense, creamy yogurt is more tart than sweet. The strawberry flavor has some fresh notes.
✓ **Bellwether Farms** A2 Organic Whole Milk, Strawberry	80	⌃	⌃⌃	$2.20/5.3	130	6	4	12	7	6	15	This creamy yogurt is tangy, with big milky and fresh strawberry flavors. It's made with milk that has only A2 protein. (A1 protein can cause digestive upset in some people.)
✓ **Fage** BestSelf Lactose Free Reduced Fat Greek, Strawberry	77	⌃	⌃⌃	$2.00/5.3	120	2.5	1.5	13	7	12	10	All yogurt is low in lactose, but this one has none. It's a bit tart, with jammy strawberry flavor and a whole-milk texture.
✓ **Siggi's** Whole Milk Skyr, Strawberry & Rhubarb	76	⌃	⌃⌃	$2.00/4.4	130	4.5	3	11	5	12	10	This thick, creamy yogurt is quite tart and just a bit sweet, with mild strawberry flavor.
✓ **Dannon Oikos** Blended Greek Nonfat, Strawberry	75	⌃	⌃	$1.80/5.3	100	0	0	13	7	13	10	The texture is thicker and creamier than you'd expect. It has big strawberry flavor and lots of strawberry pieces.
✓ **Stonyfield** Organic Lowfat, Strawberry	75	⌃	⌃	$1.80/5.3	100	1.5	1	16	7	6	15	This smooth, thin yogurt has a nice balance of sweet and tart flavors.
✓ **Siggi's** Fat Free Skyr, Strawberry	75	⌃	⌃	$1.90/5.3	110	0	0	13	7	15	10	The creamy, smooth texture is more like low-fat yogurt than nonfat. It's tangy, with slight strawberry flavor.
✓ **Nounós Creamery** Greek Strained, Strawberry Rose	71	⌃	⌃	$3.00/5.3	130	3	2	14	8	14	11	Thick and creamy, this one is more tart than sweet. The slightly perfumy rose flavor is stronger than the strawberry.
✓ **Chobani** Less Sugar Greek Reduced Fat, Monterey Strawberry	70	⌃	!	$1.70/5.3	120	3	1.5	11	5	12	10	This yogurt is tart and not too sweet. It has a floral strawberry flavor but a bit of bitterness.
✓ **Fage** Total 0% Milkfat Greek Blended, Strawberry	70	⌃	!	$2.00/5.3	100	0	0	12	7	13	10	This thick yogurt is tart with a touch of sweetness and mild strawberry flavor with floral notes.
Stonyfield Organic Whole Milk, Strawberry	70	!	⌃⌃	$1.80/5.3	140	6	3.5	17	10	5	15	A creamy, smooth blend with dairy and strawberry flavors. It's sweet and just a little tart.
Dannon Activia Low Fat, Strawberry	69	!	⌃	$1.05/4.0 [1]	90	1.5	1	15	8	4	10	A sweet-tart yogurt with good strawberry flavor.
Dannon Creamy Classic Low Fat, Strawberry	69	!	⌃	$0.63/4.0 [1]	100	1.5	1	17	9	4	10	This one has a smooth, thick texture with some strawberry bits. Nice milky and strawberry flavors, but it's slightly chalky.
Chobani Non-Fat Greek Fruit on the Bottom, Strawberry	69	!	⌃	$1.50/5.3	110	0	0	15	9	11	10	A moderately thick yogurt that's more sweet than tart.
Noosa Yoghurt, Strawberry	65	!	⌃⌃	$1.80/4.5	150	6	4	19	11	6	15	This tangy yogurt has a velvety texture and fresh strawberry flavor with hints of honey.
Dannon Fruit on the Bottom Low Fat, Strawberry	65	!	⌃⌃	$0.90/5.3	120	2	1	20	12	5	15	Smooth and on the thicker side, this yogurt has a cooked strawberry flavor.

WORSE — BETTER

✓ CR RECOMMENDED

[1] Sold in pack of four containers; price is per container. **Note:** Sodium values aren't listed here because these yogurts are not a significant source of sodium, ranging from 5 to 110 mg. Fiber also isn't listed because dairy yogurts contain small amounts. A few plant milk yogurts—Culina, Harmless Harvest, and Silk Almond—have 3 to 5 grams.

Product	Overall Score	Test Results		Price	Nutrition Information (per container)							Tasting Notes
		Nutrition score	Sensory score	Per container/ container size (oz.)	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Added sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Calcium (% daily value)	
DAIRY YOGURT *Continued*												
La Yogurt Probiotic Original Lowfat, Strawberry	58			$0.90/6.0	140	1	0.5	26	12	6	15	Smooth with scant strawberry bits, this yogurt is slightly chalky.
Yoplait Original, Strawberry	56			$0.90/6.0	140	1.5	1	27	13	5	20	This yogurt is sweet, with a candylike strawberry flavor. It has a smooth texture with a few strawberry pieces.
Oui by Yoplait Whole Milk French Style Fruit on the Bottom, Strawberry	53			$1.70/5.0	170	7	4.5	22	14	5	10	This dessertlike yogurt is rich and thick, with strawberry bits and a big jammy strawberry flavor.
Greek Gods Greek Style, Strawberry with Honey	49			$1.18/6.0 [2]	190	7	4.5	25	15	7	20	It's called Greek, but it isn't strained and has a loose texture. It's sweet with cream and some fresh berry and honey flavors.
Brown Cow Whole Milk, Strawberry on the Bottom	38			$1.40/5.3	160	5	2.5	25	16	4	10	A thick yogurt with some lumps and berry pieces. It tastes of fresh strawberries and cream with a hint of honey.
La Yogurt Sabor Latino Low Fat Blended, Strawberry	33			$0.90/6.0	170	1.5	1	32	18	7	15	This smooth, very sweet yogurt is fruity with a slight strawberry flavor.
PLANT-MILK YOGURT												
✓ **Harmless Harvest** Organic Cultured Coconut, Strawberry	65			$2.70/4.4	90	2	2	17	8	1	0	Thick and sweet, it's good but tastes more like pudding than yogurt.
Forager Project Dairy Free Cashewmilk Organic, Strawberry	57			$2.10/5.3	150	7	2	18	9	3	2	The texture is creamy and smooth. It has some nutty and strawberry flavors, but overall it's a bit bland.
Silk Almondmilk, Strawberry	54			$2.00/5.3	180	11	1	19	12	5	10	A smooth yogurt with almond and berry flavors. It's more sour than sweet.
So Delicious 0g Added Sugar Coconutmilk, Strawberry	54			$2.70/5.3	140	10	10	13	0	1	0	This yogurt is creamy, with some lumps and strawberry pieces. It's sweetened only with fruit and has a slight strawberry flavor.
Icelandic Provisions Oatmilk Skyr, Strawberry	50			$2.50/5.0	150	4	2.5	17	9	12	6	The flavors of oat and added pea protein overwhelm what little berry flavor comes through. Somewhat chalky and bitter.
Culina Coconut, Strawberry Rose	49			$4.80/5.0	240	19	18	13	7	2	6	The best-tasting plant yogurt, it has a full, rich texture and a good balance of tart and sweet flavors.
Kite Hill Original Almond Milk, Strawberry	48			$2.00/5.3	150	7	0.5	19	12	3	4	A smooth, thin yogurt with some berry bits. It's sweet and tart with some claylike flavor.
Siggi's Plant-Based Coconut Blend, Strawberry	46			$2.00/5.3	180	11	7	11	7	10	4	This yogurt is thick but not dense. It's very sour and a tad bitter, with an off, earthy taste, likely due to added pea protein.
Silk Greek Style Coconutmilk, Strawberry	39			$2.50/5.3	190	11	10	13	9	10	10	A thick, smooth yogurt with berry and slight coconut flavors. Bitter.

HOW WE TEST: CR evaluated the yogurts' nutritional makeup, factoring in calories, saturated fat, added sugars, and calcium. A professional panel of tasters sampled the yogurts in a blind taste test. The **Overall Score** is a combination of the nutrition and taste scores, with nutrition carrying slightly more weight.

[2] Sold in a 32-ounce tub. Price listed is for 6-ounce serving.

WORSE — BETTER

CR RECOMMENDED

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

Subaru Forester

The redesigned Forester retains its core virtues—great outward visibility, roominess, and standard all-wheel drive. Aside from the chunkier styling, the most significant change to this small SUV is its quieter cabin. The 180-hp, 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine has also been retuned to offer more everyday drivability.

CR'S TAKE The hushed cabin is a big improvement. While the Forester won't impress anyone with its not-so-zippy acceleration, we appreciate its smooth and predictable power delivery.

BASE PRICE RANGE $29,695-$39,995
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,395
PRICE AS DRIVEN $41,390

PHOTO: SUBARU

TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

How to Clean the Crevices in Your Car

It's easy enough to vacuum your car's interior and wipe down smooth surfaces, but what about the gunk that gets stuck in crevices? **Professional car detailers use a dry brush** to poke away at debris settled in upholstery seams and **wet Q-tips to swab dirt** in a dashboard's hard-to-reach recesses, says Michael Crossen, a mechanic at CR's Auto Test Center. "**Car detailing gel**—a sticky putty that can mold into crevices—is perfect for cleaning residue from tight spaces like cup holders," Crossen says.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

I plan to sell my car in a few years. What do I need to do now?

It's important to properly maintain your car and to make sure that Carfax has a record that you've done so. This is helpful to shoppers (as noted in CR's Used-Car Buying Guide, starting on page 50) who want to confirm that the car they're considering has had key maintenance tasks performed—like brake pad replacements and oil changes—via a vehicle history report.

To make sure your good car-care habits show up on your vehicle's Carfax report, have the work done at a shop or dealership that's part of the Carfax service network. If your repair facility isn't in the network, recommend it to Carfax for inclusion.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

12.6 YEARS

The average age of cars on the road in the U.S. right now—a record high. CR's experts say people are hanging on to their cars longer because of the high cost of new cars.

Source: S&P Global Mobility.

RECALL

Lexus/Toyota

Toyota Motor Sales is recalling more than 100,000 Lexus LX SUVs and Toyota Tundra pickup trucks from the 2022 and 2023 model years due to concerns that debris in the engine may cause internal damage. Toyota advises that owners may experience symptoms that include engine knocking or running rough, failure to start, and loss of power. Losing power on the road is obviously a huge safety risk, because it could result in a collision, possibly fatal.

WHAT TO DO

Toyota is still developing a fix. The company will notify owners of affected vehicles when it is available and provide it free of charge. For more information, call 800-331-4331.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

CR'S USED-CAR BUYING GUIDE

Get a Great Deal on a Pre-Owned Car

Now's the time to buy a used auto. But where to go and which cars to look for? Find out here.

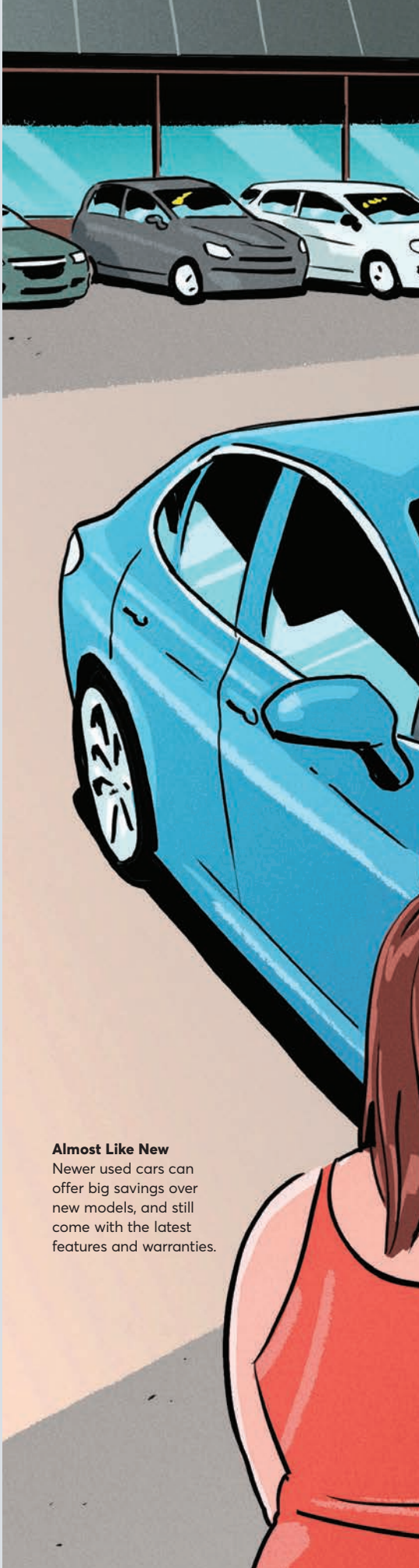
BY BENJAMIN PRESTON

ILLUSTRATION BY JACK RICHARDSON

USED-CAR PRICES SPIKED in the supply-chain chaos that followed the pandemic, when some models actually sold for more than they cost when they were new. Now, used-car prices are down about 11 percent compared with last year, selling for just under $30,000 on average. Meanwhile, new-car prices (average cost: $48,000) have continued to hover near record highs. Want a great deal on a car? Now is the time to buy a used one.

There are several ways to buy a used car. You can purchase it in a private sale from another individual. You can buy it from an independent used-car dealer or from a manufacturer-branded dealership. Or you can buy a certified pre-owned, or CPO, car, also from the manufacturer. CPO cars are thoroughly inspected before being offered for sale and are among the highest-quality used cars on the market. According to the latest Consumer Reports data, people who purchase CPO cars report 15 percent fewer problems with them than people who purchase non-CPO vehicles. They offer robust, factory-backed warranty protection and cost about 2 percent more than non-CPO used cars.

Read on to learn more about each of these ways to buy a used car and how you can find a reliable, well-maintained vehicle at a good price, no matter which approach you choose.



Almost Like New
Newer used cars can offer big savings over new models, and still come with the latest features and warranties.

$28,000
$17,000

Buying From a Person

This could mean negotiating a deal with anyone, from a friend or relative to someone who has put a "for sale" sign on their car or listed it on social media or a car-sale website.
PROS They are probably the lowest-priced vehicles, especially when paying cash for older, high-mileage cars–like a 12-year-old model with 120,000 miles.
CONS There are limited financing options and more potential for mechanical problems, particularly if the car is older than 10 years with more than 100,000 miles on the odometer.
WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR If you're buying from someone selling a car on a website like Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace, meet in a well-lit, public location like a gas station or supermarket parking lot to ensure your personal safety. As with any used car, ask to see maintenance records and a vehicle history report, and have the car inspected by a trusted mechanic. Financing can be tricky, because the seller may want cash rather than a certified bank check.

Buying From an Independent Dealer

These are used-car dealers who aren't affiliated with any particular brand of automaker. They can be well-known national chains, like CarMax or Carvana, or small-scale local dealers with generic names.
PROS They may have lower prices than a manufacturer's dealership, financing options are available, and Carvana, for example, offers a seven-day money-back return and a 100-day, 4,189-mile warranty.

GREAT CARS TO BUY USED

The following recommended models are highly reliable and have low repair costs, making them excellent used-car choices. They are so reliable that paying extra for CPO protection may not be worth the money. While we feature 2021 models because they're currently coming off lease and should be in good supply, any of these from the 2019 to 2022 model years would be a fine bet.

2021 · LEXUS NX — $38,850

OWNER SATISFACTION	RELIABILITY	NEW-CAR PRICE*
!	⇈	$47,765

3- TO 7-YEAR REPAIR/ MAINTENANCE COSTS
$2,900

ORIGINAL FACTORY WARRANTY
4-year, 50,000-mile limited;
6-year, 70,000-mile powertrain

2021 · MAZDA MX-5 MIATA — $24,100

OWNER SATISFACTION	RELIABILITY	NEW-CAR PRICE*
⇈	⇈	$32,715

3- TO 7-YEAR REPAIR/ MAINTENANCE COSTS
$1,020

ORIGINAL FACTORY WARRANTY
3-year, 36,000-mile limited;
5-year, 60,000-mile powertrain

WORSE ⇊ ⌄ ! ⌃ ⇈ BETTER

CONS These retailers lack manufacturer backing, so you have less recourse if you purchase a problem car, and in-house financing may be expensive.
WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR Independent dealers have varying standards as to what constitutes a good used car. It's important to have the car you are considering inspected by a reputable mechanic and always arrange for preapproved financing from your own bank or credit union. You may get better terms from the dealer than from your bank, but without a benchmark, you're at the dealer's mercy.

Buying a Non-Certified Car at a Branded Dealership

Branded dealerships—your local Ford, Subaru, or Volvo retailers, for example—sell used models from their own brand and others, but some are not certified by the manufacturer, which means that they lack the extra layer of warranty protection that a CPO vehicle provides.
PROS They're generally sold at a lower price than CPO cars, the car may have been serviced by the dealer, and financing options are available.
CONS Non-certified cars are typically more expensive than cars bought in private sales or at independent dealers and don't come with as generous a warranty as CPO vehicles (or may not have any warranty at all).
WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR "Unlike CPO cars, there's no manufacturer requirement that the car has to be checked according to an official inspection list, though most dealers do perform at least a basic inspection on non-certified cars," says Michael Crossen, a mechanic at CR's Auto Test Center. "To be on the safe side, you should ask for the car's vehicle history report and service records and have it checked by a mechanic you trust."

Buying a Certified Pre-Owned Car

These cars, sold by branded dealerships, go through rigorous inspections and come with manufacturer-backed warranties and other perks. They're generally among the highest-quality models and are priced about 2 percent more than non-CPO models.
PROS CPO vehicles are typically 2- and 3-year-old models coming off of a lease, which means they're newer, have low mileage, and are usually in top condition. They come with one- or two-year factory-backed warranties that kick in when the original factory warranty ends. Any issues found during the CPO inspection are addressed and repaired. (Cars with serious damage from a flood or crash, for example, do not make the CPO cut in the first place.)

The number of items on the CPO inspection checklist varies by manufacturer. Lincoln, for example,

COMPACT SUV

2021 · SUBARU FORESTER — $26,925

OWNER SATISFACTION	RELIABILITY	$32,755 NEW-CAR PRICE*

3- TO 7-YEAR REPAIR/ MAINTENANCE COSTS
$3,320

ORIGINAL FACTORY WARRANTY
3-year, 36,000-mile limited;
5-year, 60,000-mile powertrain

MIDSIZED CAR

2021 · TOYOTA CAMRY — $28,800

OWNER SATISFACTION	RELIABILITY	$33,678 NEW-CAR PRICE*

3- TO 7-YEAR REPAIR/ MAINTENANCE COSTS
$1,950

ORIGINAL FACTORY WARRANTY
3-year, 36,000-mile limited;
5-year, 60,000-mile powertrain

*Price of the model that CR purchased and tested.

performs a 200-point inspection, while the Infiniti CPO inspection covers 167 points. "Don't get hung up on the number of items on the inspection list," CR's Crossen says. "All manufacturers have the same goal, which is to make sure everything works so that it's unlikely you'll have to call the warranty into service."

Most CPO cars come with additional perks, such as free roadside assistance. Lexus offers free maintenance and oil changes for two years, and several brands offer a free satellite radio trial subscription. "As with the warranty part of the CPO contract, you should read the fine print on any prepaid maintenance plan to see what's included," says Crossen. "A free maintenance plan could cover a year's worth of full factory-recommended scheduled services, or it could just be oil changes."

Over the past few years, some automakers have also started to give CPO status to some older, higher-mileage used cars, which allows buyers with tighter budgets to enjoy some warranty protections. Acura, Ford, Toyota, and others do this, though their offerings may differ in terms of the extent and length of the extra warranty coverage. Toyota, for example, offers a category of CPO cars that can be up to 10 years old, and have as many as 125,000 miles on the odometer. The one-year/12,000-mile limited powertrain warranty included with these cars adds a level of protection long after the original warranty has expired, although it's not as comprehensive or as long as the warranties Toyota offers on newer CPO cars.

"If it's important to you to have an extra layer of security when you buy a used car, CPO is for you," says Gabe Shenhar, associate director of CR's auto test program. "This is especially true if you're buying a luxury car that will be expensive to repair. Buying a CPO vehicle can provide peace of mind because you know you'll be protected against big, unexpected bills if something goes wrong with the car."

CONS Paying extra for a CPO might not be worth it if you're buying a car known for high reliability and low repair costs, like one of those in our "Great Cars to Buy Used" list, on page 52. "You could put that money aside and use it for repairs or put it toward the cost of your next car," Crossen says.

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR While a CPO warranty is essentially an extension of the original factory warranty, it may contain more exclusions and could have hidden costs, such as deductibles, that you won't catch if you don't read the contract carefully. BMW, for example, offers a four-year, 50,000-mile warranty on its new cars that "covers all defects in parts and workmanship." Its CPO warranty extends that coverage an extra year, with unlimited mileage during that time, but excludes coverage for most suspension components (as well as a few other parts), which can be expensive to repair on those cars. Similarly, Toyota's CPO coverage excludes most suspension parts. Acura's CPO warranty, on the other hand, covers many of them.

Crossen says that the more high-tech, expensive-to-fix gadgets a car has—things like heated and cooled seats and interior LED mood lighting—the more valuable a CPO can be, as long as the warranty covers those pricey bells and whistles. He recommends making sure those items are not listed among the exclusions in the CPO warranty. "You should also be on the lookout for exclusions like sliding roof panels, convertible tops, infotainment systems, and the electronic control modules, which are all very expensive to repair or replace," Crossen says.

Should you consider it a deal-breaker if a CPO warranty doesn't cover something important? "There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer," says Crossen. "All CPOs have exclusions, but most do a good job protecting you from large, unexpected repairs. In general, you can trust the CPO warranty and buy with confidence."

Some dealers not affiliated with automakers may advertise used cars as "certified." But their warranties aren't factory-backed, Shenhar says, and the terms may be confusing, with sneaky coverage omissions. "We recommend purchasing a CPO car only from a dealership for that car's brand," Shenhar says. "For example, buy a CPO Audi only from an Audi dealer. And ask for paperwork confirming that the warranty is factory-backed."

CARS TO GET CERTIFIED PRE-OWNED

Buying a CPO version of these recommended models would be wise, given their high repair costs. We feature the 2021 models, but any of these from the 2019 to 2022 model years would be a good choice.

LUXURY
COMPACT SUV

2021 · **ACURA** RDX — $36,850

OWNER SATISFACTION

RELIABILITY

$43,995
NEW-CAR PRICE*

3- TO 7-YEAR REPAIR/ MAINTENANCE COSTS
$3,525

ORIGINAL FACTORY WARRANTY
4-year, 50,000-mile limited;
6-year, 70,000-mile powertrain

CPO WARRANTY
2-year, unlimited mileage after the original warranty expires

LUXURY
COMPACT SUV

2021 · **BMW** X3 — $33,225

OWNER SATISFACTION

RELIABILITY

$53,745
NEW-CAR PRICE*

3- TO 7-YEAR REPAIR/ MAINTENANCE COSTS
$5,100

ORIGINAL FACTORY WARRANTY
4-year, 50,000-mile limited and powertrain

CPO WARRANTY
1-year, unlimited mileage after the original warranty expires

LUXURY
MIDSIZED CAR

2021 · **MERCEDES-BENZ** E-CLASS — $45,025

OWNER SATISFACTION

RELIABILITY

$77,740
NEW-CAR PRICE*

3- TO 7-YEAR REPAIR/ MAINTENANCE COSTS
$4,700

ORIGINAL FACTORY WARRANTY
4-year, 50,000-mile limited and powertrain

CPO WARRANTY
1-year, unlimited mileage after the original warranty expires

LUXURY
COMPACT SUV

2021 · **PORSCHE** MACAN — $42,875

OWNER SATISFACTION

RELIABILITY

$63,290
NEW-CAR PRICE*

3- TO 7-YEAR REPAIR/ MAINTENANCE COSTS
$7,750

ORIGINAL FACTORY WARRANTY
4-year, 50,000-mile

CPO WARRANTY
2-year, unlimited mileage after the original warranty expires

*Price of the model that CR purchased and tested.

CR'S USED-CAR BUYING GUIDE

Should You Buy a Former Rental Car?

BY BENJAMIN PRESTON

BUYING A ONE-TIME rental car might seem like a bad idea. For starters, it's almost certainly been driven by people who may not have treated it with the same care they would for their own vehicle. But don't rule out buying a former rental car just because of that. "Used rental cars can be priced very competitively, with a wide selection of available models under $20,000," says Michael Crossen, a mechanic at CR's Auto Test Center. "Depending on which company you buy from, used rental cars can also come with warranty protections that can reduce financial risk." Major rental car companies such as Enterprise and Hertz offer limited warranties, roadside assistance, haggle-free pricing, and the option to return the car within a week if you change your mind. Some companies also accept trade-ins and offer financing (be sure to research other financing options to find the best rate before deciding on any offer). Understanding how former rental car sales work and the protections various companies offer will help minimize the risk and maximize the reward of buying one.

Where to Go for a Former Rental Car

Avis, Enterprise, Hertz, and other rental car companies have websites dedicated to car sales, which outline the terms of their programs and allow you to search inventory by brand, location, price, and other filters. Some may even deliver the car for an extra fee. Smaller rental car companies also sell their used inventory, but some don't offer the additional warranty protections or other perks. "If you're buying a used rental car, we recommend buying from one of the biggest companies for extra protections and the widest selection of models," Crossen says. "But you still need to closely review the terms before you buy."

Make Sure You're Protected

Some cars may still be covered by the original factory warranty. For those that are not, many companies, including Avis, Enterprise, and Hertz, offer a 12-month/12,000-mile limited warranty from the time of purchase. "I wouldn't buy from a company that doesn't offer at least that much coverage," Crossen says. "It shows that they stand behind the condition of the car." A year of roadside assistance is another common perk. Enterprise will buy the car back if you change your mind during the first seven days or 1,000 miles; Hertz allows you to rent the car for three days at a special rate for an extended test drive before you buy it.

Best Former Rental Cars

Your best bet is to buy a reliable model recommended by CR. Refer to CR's automobile ratings and reliability data to find the models that meet these criteria. Nissan Altima and Toyota Camry and RAV4 are all reliable recommended models that are used in rental fleets and should be easy to find. Crossen says that before buying any used EV or hybrid, you should have the battery health checked by a specialist, and confirm that the battery warranty will still be in effect after purchase. "Used rental EVs may have been charged at DC fast chargers very frequently, which can be hard on the battery," he warns.

Before You Buy

Some rental car companies, such as Enterprise, provide a free vehicle history report for every car they sell. Regardless, you should request service records to make sure the car has been maintained regularly. Crossen highly recommends having any used car inspected by an independent mechanic to spot potential problems before you buy. He also suggests making sure it comes with an owner's manual, floor mats, and two sets of keys. Some rental car companies sell used cars that were not rentals. Any recalls on either rental or non-rental cars should have been addressed already. For an idea of how fair the price is, go to **CR.org/carvalue**.

ILLUSTRATION BY JACK RICHARDSON

COMPACT ELECTRIC CARS

Hyundai Kona Electric

A Competent and Budget-Friendly EV

58
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 73

HIGHS Quick and quiet acceleration, short stops, easy controls, robust driving range, fairly speedy charging

LOWS Interior has lots of hard plastic, noisy cabin for an EV

POWERTRAIN 201-hp, electric motor; 1-speed direct drive; front-wheel drive

RANGE 245 miles

PRICE $32,675-$41,045 base price + $1,375 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $38,460

THE REDESIGNED Kona Electric is a mostly enjoyable, reasonably priced little runabout that's zippy and has short stopping distances and user-friendly controls. The version we tested managed a decent 245 miles in our 70-mph highway range test. Elevated wind and road noise make the cabin loud for an EV, though, and the abundance of hard plastic trim throughout the interior (including the armrests!) is disappointing.

Acceleration from the 201-hp electric motor is swift and effortless; it's about 2.5 seconds quicker from 0 to 60 mph than the gas-powered Kona. The 11-kilowatt onboard charger allows you to gain about 37 miles of range per hour using 240 volts, and Hyundai says the battery can be amped up from 10 to 80 percent in 43 minutes at public DC fast chargers. But the charging port's location low on the grille (rather than on the side of the car, as in most EVs) means that it gets covered with bugs and road grime.

Thanks to its small size it's easy enough to take the Kona through corners, and it proved predictable and forgiving when pushed hard in our handling tests. The suspension is firm but rarely allows harsh hits into the cabin. Braking is excellent, both in terms of short panic-brake stops and pedal feel.

Nicely shaped front seats do a good job of holding you in place through corners. But the steering wheel rim can block the turn signal and headlight icons at the top of the driver's instrument screen. The rear seat is spacious for a small vehicle, with ample headroom and good underleg support.

The infotainment screen is easy to use, and we especially like the physical climate-control buttons.

LUXURY PLUG-IN HYBRID SUVs

Lexus RX450h+

Comfy and Efficient, but Engine Is Noisy

89
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 94

HIGHS Can drive on electric power part time, great fuel economy, comfortable ride, high-quality cabin

LOWS Noisy gas engine, confusing controls, hampered visibility

POWERTRAIN 304-hp, 2.5-liter turbo 4-cylinder plug-in hybrid; CVT; AWD

RANGE 37 miles EV[E] + 490 miles gas

FUEL 34 mpg on premium

PRICE $68,730 base price + $1,395 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $75,860

THE RX450h+ plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) elevates the regular RX hybrid to new heights. Its relatively large battery pack gives an EPA-estimated 37 miles of electric driving for commuting or around-town errands, while the gasoline engine delivers the same 34 mpg as the RX350 hybrid for longer trips. The battery can be charged overnight in 11.5 hours using the supplied charging cable with a standard 120-volt household outlet or in about 3 hours using a 240-volt EV charger.

In addition to the benefit of being able to drive solely on electricity, the RX PHEV has more power than the regular RX hybrid. We clocked a 6.4-second 0-to-60 mph time, which is about 1.5 seconds quicker than the hybrid. That said, the PHEV's 2.5-liter turbocharged four-cylinder gets loud and gritty, especially when pushed—such as when merging onto the highway or climbing a steep hill—which seems out of place for an expensive luxury SUV.

In most other ways, the PHEV mirrors the rest of the RX line, with a comfortable ride but also slightly mushy, unexceptional handling. As with most Lexus models, the RX is finished with lots of soft leather and fine stitching. The front and rear seats are comfortable, and we appreciate the center console's thick padding where the driver's right knee rests.

The touchscreen-based infotainment system is easier to use than the previous RX's touchpad system, though it's annoying that some common tasks require multiple steps. While we like the standard head-up display, we don't like that it's paired with unlabeled steering wheel controls that are confusing to use.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

[E]EPA-estimated range.

BY MIKE MONTICELLO

MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS

Chevrolet Colorado

Improved Power, Ride, and Handling

56
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 71

HIGHS Relatively agile handling, comfortable ride for a pickup, automatic 4WD mode

LOWS Raspy engine, tight rear seat

POWERTRAIN 310-hp, 2.7-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 19 mpg on regular

PRICE $29,500-$46,800 base price + $1,595 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $41,070

THE REDESIGNED COLORADO midsized pickup truck has a number of welcome improvements compared with its predecessor. It's quicker, handles better, and is more comfortable and fuel-efficient. Plus, AEB with pedestrian detection now comes standard, though BSW and RCTW are optional.

The Colorado's 310-hp, 2.7-liter turbo four packs a healthy midrange punch, but we found that you have to press the gas pedal farther than normal to access that power. When you do, it can gallop from 0 to 60 mph in 6.9 seconds, which is quick for a midsized pickup, though the engine sounds rather raspy.

Handling is competent for a truck. The suspension keeps the Colorado tracking predictably through turns even on rough surfaces. We like that four-wheel-drive versions have an Auto setting that allows 4WD to be engaged indefinitely, a major advantage on slippery roads. Unlike most competitors, the Colorado absorbs bumps in a palatable way, rather than being overly stiff and choppy.

The front seat and driving position have been improved, with more adjustability than in the previous generation, although overall comfort is merely average. The rear seat is quite cramped, with limited headroom and knee room and a very upright seatback.

The controls are mostly easy to use, but there are a few quirks, such as having to interact with the center screen to reset the trip computer, along with some unlabeled steering wheel functions.

As far as truck duties go, maximum towing is a generous 7,700 pounds and payload capacity is 1,620 pounds. A built-in step in the rear bumper eases access to the bed.

LUXURY ELECTRIC SUVs

Cadillac Lyriq

Swift, Agile, and Luxurious

65
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 84

HIGHS Quick acceleration, quiet cabin, satisfying ride/handling balance, high-quality interior, fast home charging, excellent active driving assistance system

LOWS Awkward door handles, thick roof pillars hamper visibility

POWERTRAIN 500-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; AWD

RANGE 315 miles

PRICE $57,195-$69,695 base price + $1,395 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $73,945

THE LYRIQ is Cadillac's first fully electric vehicle. It shares a platform with the Chevrolet Blazer EV, which we tested previously. The Lyriq's long driving range, quick and quiet acceleration, athletic handling, and comfortable ride make it a compelling choice. Despite its high road-test score, we can't recommend it yet because we lack data on General Motors' new EV platform.

With a supersmooth 500 hp from its dual electric motors, the Lyriq is speedy, catapulting from 0 to 60 mph in 5.1 seconds. It also notched an impressive 315 miles in our 70-mph highway range test.

We appreciate how easy Cadillac makes it to turn the Lyriq's "one-pedal driving" (in which you control the car's acceleration and braking with just the accelerator pedal) on or off by pressing an icon on the infotainment screen. You can also apply on-demand braking force (without being in one-pedal mode) by pulling and holding a paddle on the steering wheel, similar to a hand brake on a bicycle.

The front seats are comfortable, but the bottom cushion could use more pronounced side bolsters. There's a lot of knee room and good foot space in the rear seat, though it's compromised by protruding anchors for child car seats. The heated/cooled seat buttons and lumbar adjustment controller on the door are awkward to use, as are the very thin pop-out exterior door handles.

The midlevel Luxury trim we purchased has the latest version of GM's Super Cruise, which is one of the best active driving assistance systems. It can handle acceleration, braking, and steering on mapped highways and some two-lane roads.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **From Pickups to PHEVs** This month we test budget-friendly and luxury EVs, a PHEV version of the vaunted Lexus RX, and an improved midsized pickup truck.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results										ADAS
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	BSW/RCTW
COMPACT ELECTRIC CARS																
✓ **Kia Niro EV**	71	$42,595			76	NA	239							7.1	128	S
Hyundai Kona Electric	58	$38,460			73	NA	245							7.2	123	S
Nissan Leaf	57	$44,330			61	NA	212E							7.0	139	S
LUXURY ELECTRIC SUVs																
✓ **BMW iX**	84	$92,695			91	NA	370							4.3	127	S
✓ **Lexus RZ**	74	$63,405			70	NA	202							4.9	138	S
✓ **Tesla Model Y**	72	$61,190			88	NA	330E							4.7	121	–
✓ **Audi Q8 E-Tron**	70	$80,450			86	NA	285E							6.3	131	S
✓ **Genesis Electrified GV70**	69	$67,595			79	NA	220							4.0	133	S
Cadillac Lyriq	65	$73,945			84	NA	315							5.1	132	S
Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV	54	$84,690			76	NA	284							5.9	124	S
Rivian R1S	52	$79,250			72	NA	316E							3.5	132	S
LUXURY PHEV/HYBRID SUVs																
✓ **Lexus RX450h+ PHEV** 2.5T+E	89	$75,860			94	34	37E + 490							6.4	135	S
✓ **Lexus RX350h** 2.5H	83	$59,955			86	34	585							7.8	137	S
Volvo XC60 PHEV 2.0T+E	56	$67,290			86	28	35E + 525							4.8	129	S
Jeep Grand Cherokee 4xe 2.0T+E	55	$64,795			75	21	25E + 400							6.1	142	S
MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS																
✓ **Honda Ridgeline** 3.5L	78	$36,480			83	20	380							7.3	134	S
Chevrolet Colorado 2.7T	56	$41,070			71	19	410							6.9	134	O
GMC Canyon 2.7T	56	$44,970			71	19	410							6.9	134	O
Nissan Frontier 3.8L	48	$40,630			67	18	370							7.5	128	O
Jeep Gladiator 3.6L	45	$46,405			52	18	400							7.8	135	O

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction**, and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's active driving assistance system has inadequate direct driver monitoring.

WORSE – BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

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The Better Deal

Many of the products we test at CR earn high ratings for their impressive performance—but some are also a really great value. They have most (if not all) of the attributes of other top-rated products at a much lower price. Check out the deals we found for you this month.

LUXURY MIDSIZED CARS

AUDI A6
$58,100-$83,700 **76**

LEXUS ES
$42,040-$52,330 **82**

THE BETTER DEAL

THE LOWDOWN

THE AUDI A6 is an impressive sedan, with a supremely comfortable interior, lively and sporty handling, and an easy-to-use infotainment system. But this kind of European luxury comes at a premium price—and, often, expensive maintenance and repair bills. Instead, consider the refined Lexus ES. Its controls are not quite as easy to use, but it offers a smoother ride, costs less up front, and has lower ownership costs, along with better reliability.

CAST-IRON FRYING PANS

FINEX CAST IRON
$230 **78**

THE BETTER DEAL

BAYOU CLASSIC CAST IRON COOKWARE
$45 **78**

THE LOWDOWN

THE PRICEY FINEX PAN excels in our steak-searing test; bakes up fluffy, golden cornbread; and has a lifetime warranty. Its octagonal shape is more than just eye-catching: It lets you pour pan drippings from eight angles. Despite a more basic design, the Bayou Classic delivers equally impressive results. It sears as well as the Finex and heats more evenly, but it's not quite as good for baking. Its handle gets a little hotter (you'll need a pot holder for either one), and it has only a one-year warranty—but those drawbacks may seem small when you consider the big savings.

PORTABLE GENERATORS (2,500-4,900W)

CHAMPION 201223
$800 **81**

THE BETTER DEAL

WEN GN5602X
$375 **80**

THE LOWDOWN

THESE GENERATORS deliver enough wattage to power several appliances, and they handle surges very well. Both have an electric starter and a low-oil shutoff. The higher-priced Champion can run on either gas or propane. If you don't already use propane, it might not be worth paying so much extra for that option.

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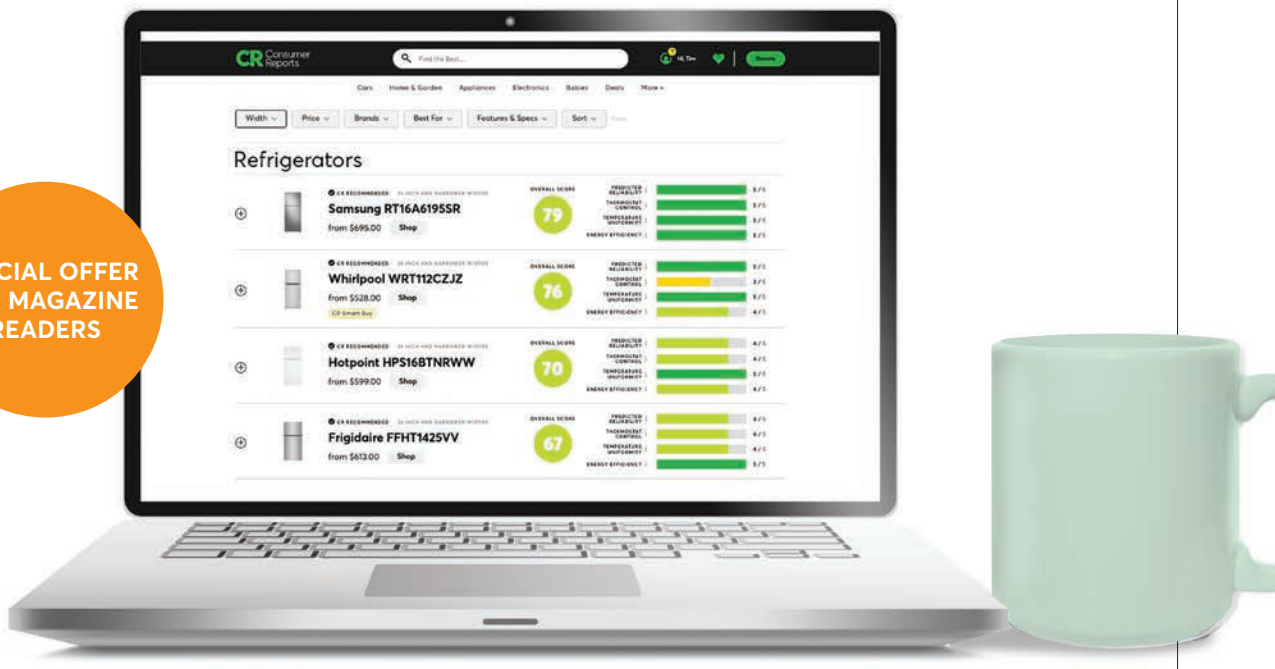

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